The New Criterion

May 1991

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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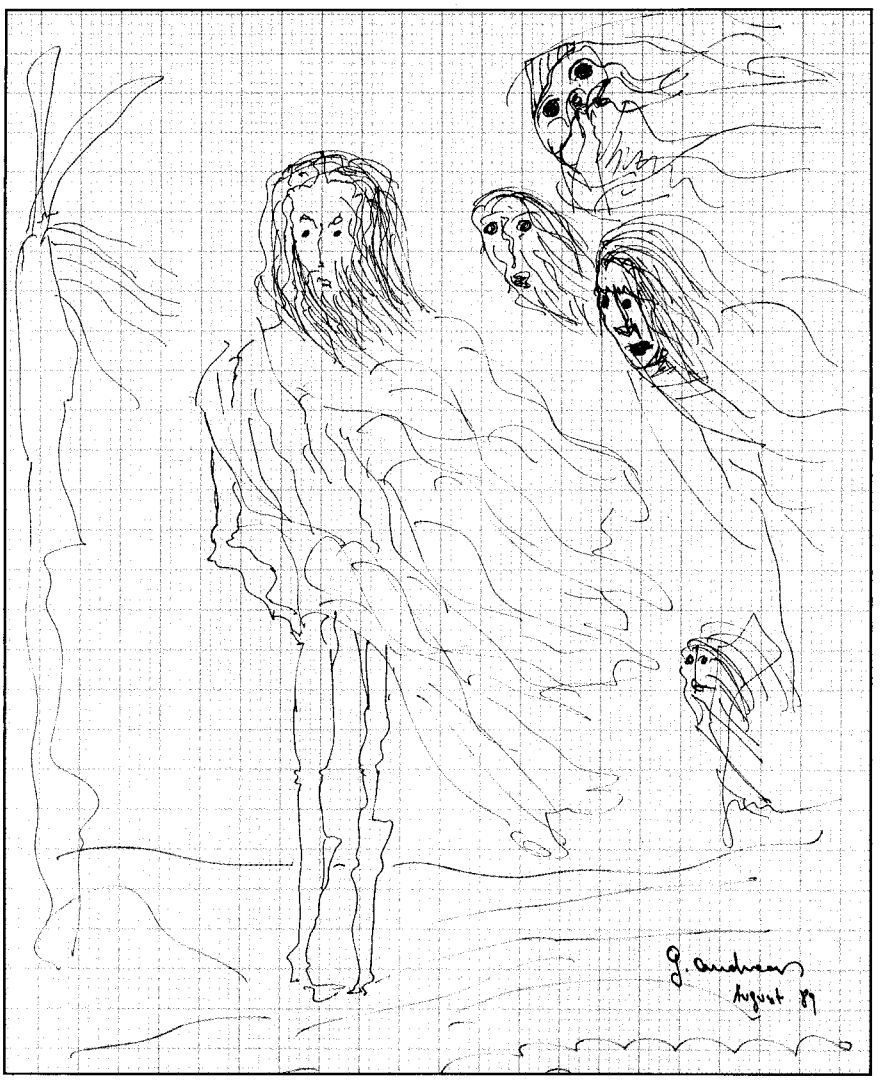

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Joseph Epstein's *A Line Out for a Walk*, his fourth collection of familiar essays, has just been published by W. W. Norton.

Roger Kimball's book, *Tenured Radicals*, is now available in paperback from HarperPerennial.

Samuel Lipman's latest book is *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture*, a collection of essays published by Godine.

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Jed Perl's art chronicle, *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World*, is out this month from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Deborah Rosenthal, a painter and teacher, wrote about Burgoyne Diller for our December issue.

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Notes & Comments: May 1991

The outlook for the Barnes Foundation

Although it remains virtually unknown to the people who can nowadays be counted upon to turn up in record numbers wherever a museum mounts a major exhibition of Impressionist or Postimpressionist painting, the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia, is one of the major collections of modern painting in the United States, and it is especially rich in the works of artists now so popular with the museumgoing public—Renoir, Cézanne, and Matisse, above all. There are indeed more pictures by Renoir and Cézanne in the Barnes collection than in the collection of any other American museum, and there are certain individual works—Seurat's *Les Poseuses* (1888) and Matisse's *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (1905-6)—that are almost without rival. There are also a good many American paintings from the modern period.

That these and the other remarkable holdings of the Barnes Foundation have remained all but unknown to the general public is the direct result of the program instituted by the founder of this great collection, Albert C. Barnes, who died in 1951. Dr. Barnes, a medical doctor who made a fortune marketing the antiseptic Argyrol, was a great collector and a serious thinker about art, and he had some very definite ideas about how it should be shown—and to whom. He founded a school at the Barnes Foundation, and this school has played a greater role in the life of art in this country than our art historians have yet caught up with. He also wrote a series of books—on Cézanne, on Renoir, and on Matisse, among others—that upheld the essentially formalist view of art in which he passionately believed.

Dr. Barnes never made it easy for outsiders to have ready access to his collection even after it was established as a gallery and a school, but a lawsuit after his death resulted in a somewhat more relaxed admission policy, and the public is now admitted in limited numbers. The money provided by Dr. Barnes for the upkeep of the gallery and its collection has proved to be inadequate, however, and now the trustees of the Barnes Foundation have gone to court in the hope of overcoming the collector's prohibition against the selling of pictures from his collection. According to the statement issued by the president of the Barnes Foundation —Richard H. Glanton—on March 29, "The Board has made no decision regarding the sale of paintings, but is simply asking for the option to sell, *if* that is the only means of raising the funds needed to adequately conserve the Foundation's holdings." In other words, we are faced with that now familiar prospect: pictures will be "deaccessioned," and the integrity of the collection will be compromised in the interest of "conserving" it.

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There can be no question but that the Barnes Foundation is a needy case. Its collection has not enjoyed the kind of professional care that its quality calls for, and the building itself is in urgent need of rehabilitation. New policies about loans to other museums, which Dr. Barnes also prohibited, should be seriously considered, and in many other respects the gallery should be reorganized on a more professional basis. Yet it is a sign of the moral condition that has overtaken the entire museum profession that it can offer no solution to the Barnes's problems but the prospect of diminishing the scope of the collection through the deaccessioning process.

American art museums more exalted than the Barnes, or at least more famous, have set a terrible precedent in this respect. It has now become so habitual for American museums to sell masterworks out of their collections for financial purposes that the profession itself has been stripped of its moral authority to mount any arguments against this deplorable practice. With the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art, just to mention a few outstanding cases, all selling pictures—and pictures of outstanding quality—to meet short-term goals, it is a hard task indeed to argue with the even more urgent needs of the Barnes Foundation.

Yet with the Barnes case we are given an opportunity to mount a campaign against this terrible policy, and can only hope the uproar will be sufficient to inspire alternative solutions to the Barnes's real problems. A great collection is something more, after all, than an agglomeration of objects. It is also the history of the institution—including, it must be said, the history of its mistakes. There are certainly some inferior pictures in the Barnes collection—among them, some of the Renoirs—but these mistakes are unlikely to be the objects nominated for sale. In the deaccessioning business, you go for the big kill. But the kind of killing the Barnes would hope to make from such sales would also inflict violence upon the institution itself. It would be a ghastly irony indeed if in the name of providing greater public access to the Barnes collection, the collection itself was to be stripped of some of its artistic treasures. The time has come to call a halt to this assault on a public trust.

Hate speech at Columbia

We were recently treated to a sterling example of the new academic intolerance at work when the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University sponsored a lecture by Mari J. Matsuda on the subject of "Hate Speech, Sexual Harassment, and Academic Freedom." A proponent of what is sometimes called critical race studies, Professor Matsuda was graduated from Harvard Law School and now teaches law at the University of Hawaii. Her articles decrying what it pleases her to call "hate speech" have put her in the vanguard of the academic juggernaut to enforce political correctness.

Professor Matsuda began her lecture blandly enough by arguing that there were "limits of appropriate behavior" that ought to be observed on our campuses—who could argue with that?—but it soon became clear that she was a woman in the grip of an obsession. Having traveled around the country for five years talking about sexual harassment, she finally had a revelation. "[U]nder the appearance of normalcy I came to see an epidemic of harassment and hateful behavior against women" on campus. Not only does she seem to think that every man is a potential rapist, she also believes that "Few women will leave our campuses without encountering sexual harassment in the form of unwanted advances or a hostile environment created by sexual comments, pornography, or other forms of misogyny." Things are equally bad for blacks, homosexuals, etc. In her view, our campuses are rife with bad attitudes, and things are getting worse by the

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minute. "Students would call me anonymously to tell me stories rich with the kind of detail that only comes from the truth."

Professor Matsuda's solution to this "emergency" is, quite simply, censorship. The university has rules against cheating, plagiarism, and theft, she reasoned, so why not against politically incorrect speech? She repeatedly assured her audience that she "believed" in the First Amendment "particularly in these days of growing militarism," and that she was not against dissent, especially dissent directed against "the government and the powerful institutions that affect our lives." But when a member of the audience asked about the phenomenon of political correctness on campus, Professor Matsuda responded angrily that the media's reporting of the issue was "a complete lie." She even seems to believe that partisan politics are somehow involved: "The recent indication that the Republican Party intends to exploit racial tension"—she never said what indication she had in mind—"was one hint among many that things are going to get worse before they get better."

Early on in her talk, Professor Matsuda defined "hate speech" as "verbal attacks the only function of which is to wound and degrade by suggesting the inferiority of a group." But as the evening wore on, it became clear that "hate speech" was a highly elastic category that could be expanded to cover just about any contingency. While Professor Matsuda pretended to offer a reflection on free speech and the First Amendment, her talk was in fact little more than a tissue of slogans and exhortations whose chief purpose was to provide a justification for enforcing politically correct attitudes. And this brings us to what is perhaps the most ironical development in the explosion of rules and regulations designed to prohibit "offensive" speech on campus. After spending more than two decades attempting to destroy every trace of propriety and mannerly decorum on campus—what, after all, could be more "bourgeois" than good manners?—our academic radicals are now promulgating codes as sweeping as they are vague to regulate speech and expression. The new speech codes are not aimed exclusively or even primarily at prohibiting racial slurs or what the law calls "fighting words": protection from verbal abuse had already, and rightly, been part of the traditional notion of proper behavior. The presumed jurisdiction of the new regulations extends beyond content to the tone and attitude of what is said, written, published, and debated. "Misdirected laughter," for example, is routinely regarded as a punishable offense on many campuses. In some cases, the new academic thought police even attempt to regulate what is *not* said, as when an editor of a student newspaper was removed from his post because he had given "insufficient coverage" to minority events. What was once a demand for unlimited freedom has thus become a demand for unlimited censorship.

Far from representing a return to civility, as Professor Matsuda and others suggest, what we might call the hegemony of political correctness is nothing less than a campaign of intellectual and moral indoctrination: an effort to recast the traditional, liberal ethos of the academy to make it conform to a mandatory multicultural radicalism. Like most modern tyrannies, the dictatorship of the politically correct freely uses and abuses the rhetoric of virtue in its effort to enforce conformity and silence dissent. Those who fifteen minutes ago were telling us that there is no such thing as truth, that all values are relative, that morality is strictly a "personal" matter are now clamoring for the imposition of stringent controls on speech—all in the name of a higher virtue and sensitivity. This union of moralism and radicalism, while hardly a novel mixture—it is indeed the stock in trade of left-wing tyranny—is particularly destructive in an institution dedicated to intellectual inquiry because it attacks the very basis for the free exchange of ideas. The question remains: is this what the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia stands for?

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Thinking about "The Forties"

by Hilton Kramer

The exhibition called "Art of the Forties" at the Museum of Modern Art has come and gone without leaving much of a residue of discussion or debate.[1] For the public, it seems to have been taken as another easy dose of nostalgia for a period now mainly associated with old movies and World War II memorabilia. For the critics, it was also something of a blur. The younger critics seemed content to take the show at face value, accepting it as a more or less accurate account of a decade that is as distant from their personal experience as the 1890s were from that of their counterparts fifty years ago. As for the older critics, who had plenty of reason to know what was wrong with the show, there just aren't that many around anymore who write about such events. So the many false notes, the misleading claims, the glaring omissions, and the woeful distortions that made "Art of the Forties" a travesty of both history and aesthetics were pretty much allowed to pass without question or protest. A crucial decade in art, culture, and politics was cheerfully reduced to a package tour of styles and fashions and signs of the times without a hint of the issues that made the Forties the gateway to a new era.

It was somehow appropriate, then, that the most enthusiastic public endorsement of the exhibition should have come from a quarter we seldom associate with aesthetic discrimination or intellectual probity—the retail fashion world. In March, as part of its pre-Easter promotion of men's and women's fashions for the spring season, Barney's—the posh emporium that ministers the sartorial needs of the chic and well-heeled—devoted the display windows of its flagship store on Seventh Avenue in New York to a celebration of "Art of the Forties." The result was in some respects the most telling commentary the show received. In these window displays, Mondrian's great *Broadway Boogie Woogie* —transformed for the occasion into a Warhol-style series of repeated uniform images, just as if it were a Campbell's Soup label—competed for attention with a famous still from the movie *Casablanca*, and Picasso's *The Charnel House* was made to share, with some unlovely examples of "Tupperware," the honor of serving as promotional material for the sale of expensive male attire. (That *The Charnel House*, with its horrific depiction of the carnage of war, is now thought to be an appropriate vehicle for the promotion of fashion is itself a measure of how little the Forties have come to mean to us—a failure of understanding that "Art of the Forties" did much to abet and nothing to repair.) This reduction of the show to a succession of representative images—some high, some low, some merely innocuous —turned out to be a more accurate gloss on "Art of the Forties" than almost anything written about it. In Barney's window dis-

1 "Art of the Forties," organized by Riva Castleman, et al., was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from February 24 through April 30, 1991.

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plays, the spirit of the exhibition was given its perfect correlative.

The show itself was a dispiriting jumble in which finger bowls, earthenware dishes, a sleek sports car, a cocktail shaker, an airplane propeller, and those "Tupperware" kitchen containers were thrown into a mix with paintings, sculpture, drawings, photographs, posters, and prints that were themselves drawn from very disparate levels of accomplishment—not excluding, alas, the lowest. There is a tradition, or at least a precedent, for shows of this kind at the Museum of Modern Art, but on the evidence of "Art of the Forties" I think we can now say with some confidence that time has not been kind to the idea governing such exhibitions. For one thing, we are no longer persuaded that the museum speaks with any special authority about that elusive phenomenon known as "good design," or even that the museum's notion of "good design" is—well, necessarily good design. Then, too, a lot of what the museum once collected under this rubric in the bad old days, when a taste for the "modern"—in cocktail shakers, for example—was thought to be daring and "advanced," now has a period look more appropriate to the flea market or the antique shop than to a serious art museum.

The truth is, design objects are in some essential respects not at all like works of art. They tend to age rather more quickly—and irreversibly—than authentic works of art do. It is not only their function that is different; their very nature belongs to another order of experience. Whereas art addresses what is permanent in our experience, design inevitably deals in what is temporary and transitory. What we have every reason to expect of a work of art—that it transcend the circumstances of its creation—is not something we can reasonably demand of a design object. To show such objects cheek-by-jowl, as it were, with some of the best art of the period is bound, therefore, to have a leveling effect on the entire exhibition—an effect that reduces everything, from the most inspired creation to the most mundane production, to the same level of material culture, where aesthetic distinctions are obviated and the accidents of historical propinquity are elevated to a factitious significance they never enjoyed in real life.

It is for this reason, among others, that artists are generally opposed to such exhibitions, which devalues what they regard as the most important element in their work—its imaginative individuality—and places the hard-won victories of the studio alongside the products of the factory and the advertising business. You would have to be a certain kind of museum functionary to believe at this late date that there really is some meaningful connection—meaningful enough, anyway, to base an entire exhibition on—between, say, Picasso's *The Charnel House*, Matisse's *Jazz*, Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, Miró's *The Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers*, Giacometti's *City Square*, and the paintings of de Kooning, Pollock, Motherwell, Rothko, and Pousette-Dart, on the one hand, and such items as Kaj Franck's "Kilta" tableware, Marcello Nizzoli's "Lexikon 80" typewriter, James L. Prestini's bowls and platters, and a plethora of World War II propaganda posters, on the other. If the same museum attempted to mount an exhibition today that juxtaposed the work of Diebenkorn, Kiefer, Frankenthaler, Kelly, Caro, Wilmarth, and some of the other well-regarded painters and sculptors in its permanent collection with, say, a Cuisinart food-processor, a Walkman radio, an IBM computer, a Toyota, a telephone-answering machine, and the tableware on sale at Conran's in a representative survey of "Art of the Eighties," the howls of derision would be deafening—and some of the artists would certainly demand that their work be removed from the show. Yet we are asked to accept as "history" what we know from our own experience to be a completely false and misleading conjunction of disparate objects.

Even in the selection of works of art, moreover, "Art of the Forties" was woefully deficient and distorted. It consisted, for the most part, of an uncritical miscellany that reminded us at every turn that this was not an

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exhibition governed by rigorous artistic standards but only another of those anthologies assembled by committee deliberation. The curator ostensibly in charge of the resulting mess was Riva Castleman, long the director of MOMA's department of prints and illustrated books and lately elevated to the post of deputy director for curatorial affairs; but the show was actually the work of a bureaucratic task-force, with no fewer than six other curators, aided in their endeavors by the "advice and assistance" of an even larger number of auxiliary curators, involved in its assembly. Which meant, among much else, that the show was more the product of political horse-trading among contending curatorial departments than of any decisive or coherent judgments of quality. Everything in the show was drawn from MOMA's own collections, to be sure, but we know from experience that this is anything but a guarantee of consistent quality. If you look at the photographs in "Art of the Forties," for example, and compare them to the photographs from the Forties in John Szarkowski's recent "Photography Until Now" exhibition at MOMA, you will see the difference between pictures selected on the basis of quality and those designed merely to "represent" the period in some documentary fashion.

But then, it was never really the goal of "Art of the Forties" to give us a disinterested account of the achievements of the Forties. From the outset its purpose was a far narrower one: to document the museum's own history in the Forties. If the show had been more accurately titled—as it should have been—"MOMA in the Forties," its quality would not in any way have been improved but its true scope and focus would have been more openly avowed and the result not so easily mistaken for what the show was not: a serious re-examination of the period under review.

In approaching this show as a history of MOMA's activities in the Forties, however, the question must be asked: Is the museum even now, half a century later, in a position to give us a frank and credible account of its own history in that decade? The Forties was a very troubled time for the Museum of Modern Art. It had emerged from the first decade of its existence at the end of the Thirties with a handsome new building and an impressive record of exhibitions and acquisitions in the field of modern European art. In this respect, at least, it was already a museum without serious rival. Yet its record in regard to American modernism was far more problematical, not to say evasive, and remained so right through the Forties. In the Thirties, MOMA had actually given overwhelming priority to the realist, regionalist, neo-romantic, and social-consciousness painters then so popular, and largely spurned the work of our struggling and neglected native modernists—a policy that prompted the then new American Abstract Artists group to mount a protest, late in the decade, that posed the question: How modern *is* the Museum of Modern Art?

In the Forties, this partiality for realist, social-realist, regionalist, and neo-romantic art continued to exert a powerful influence. The principal survey shows of contemporary American art mounted at the museum during the war years—"Americans 1942," "American Realists and Magic Realists," "Romantic Painting in America"—steadfastly ignored all modernist developments. The artist especially favored in this period was Pavel Tchelitchew, whose work was the subject of a major exhibition in 1942. The situation improved some with the "Fourteen Americans" show that Dorothy Miller organized in 1946—an exhibition in which Arshile Gorky, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, Isamu Noguchi, and Mark Tobey, among others, shared attention with sundry romantics and social realists. And in the Forties there were also retrospectives devoted to Alexander Calder, Marsden Hartley, Lyonel Feininger, and Stuart Davis. (Of these artists, oddly enough, only Calder made it into "Art of the Forties," which omitted all trace of Hartley, Feininger, and Davis. But then, there is no trace, either, of John Marin, Milton Avery, or Arnold Fried-

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man—and David Smith, the greatest sculptor of the period, was represented by a minor bronze plaque that was clearly a holdover from the Thirties and not by any of the work that established his artistic preeminence in the late Forties.)

The full story of the turmoil and dissension that afflicted MOMA in the Forties has never been told, though there are bits and pieces of this bizarre tale in the published accounts. In 1943, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director, was fired, and a good deal of chaos resulted from that fateful decision. Major trustees and benefactors of the museum were in a state of eruption over the new art of the period, rejecting not only Pollock and Rothko but Giacometti as well. It was said of Stephen Clark, who as president of the museum and chairman of its board had fired Barr, that he thought nothing of walking into an exhibition and removing a painting from the wall if he didn't like it. (He capped his dismissal of Barr and his distaste for MOMA generally by leaving his collection of earlier modernist masterworks to the Metropolitan Museum.) One result of this turmoil and acrimony was an attitude of caution bordering on paralysis as far as American abstract art was concerned. When the museum mounted its fifteenth-anniversary exhibition in 1944 under the title "Art in Progress," the very few abstract works by American artists (Dove, Gorky, Davis, and I. Rice Pereira) were swamped by the usual avalanche of realists, social realists, neo-romantics, etc.

Yet it isn't as if European art in the Forties was fully represented in "Art of the Forties," either. There was a Bonnard exhibition at MOMA in 1948, but there was no Bonnard in "Art of the Forties"—and no Braque, no Arp, no Kandinsky, no Laurens, no Derain, no Nicholson, and no Hepworth. Alas, Ben Shahn and Andrew Wyeth, artists much favored by the museum, were all too conspicuously present. One has to conclude, on the basis of "Art of the Forties," that the Forties were not an especially happy decade upon which to base an exhibition drawn from the museum's own art collections.

Nor is the book accompanying the exhibition a very reliable guide to the decade.[2] As a catalogue of the exhibition, *Art of the Forties* is anything but complete; it is a book of souvenirs, and its most curious feature is the ten-page "Chronology" of the decade which attempts to encompass not only developments in all of the arts but also the most significant events occurring in literature, philosophy, science, economics, and political and social history—a tall order, indeed, that this fragmentary compilation doesn't come even close to fulfilling. Riva Castleman's notion—or that of her researchers, anyway—about what was important in the literature or political thought of the Forties is at times distinctly odd. You would never know from this "Chronology" that Wallace Stevens published two important books in the Forties—*Parts of a World* (1942) and *Transport to Summer* (1947)—or that W. H. Auden's *Collected Poetry* appeared in 1945 and Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle* in 1946. The novels of Upton Sinclair and John Hersey are duly taken note of, but not Lionel Trilling's *The Middle of the Journey* (1947). Not a single work by Edmund Wilson is mentioned, nor is Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), which did so much to rehabilitate Faulkner and establish him as the classic he is now universally recognized to be. Instead we are offered lists of forgotten potboilers and best-sellers—*The Moon is Down*, *Strange Fruit*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, etc. Miss Castleman makes a passing and somewhat arch reference to recent events in Central and Eastern Europe in her introduction to this book, but she shies away from ever mentioning Communism or the Cold War, which is something of a feat for a writer dealing with the Forties. She appears never to have heard of Friedrich A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), which is a lot more relevant to recent events in Central and Eastern Europe than a lot of things she does mention, or *The*

2 *Art of the Forties*, edited, with an introduction, by Riva Castleman, and with an essay by Guy Davenport; The Museum of Modern Art/Harry N. Abrams, 160 pages, $39.95; $19.95 paper.

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God That Failed (1949), in which Arthur Koestler, Richard Wright, Stephen Spender, and others spoke of their bitter experience with Communism just as the Cold War was heating up. The sad truth is, Miss Castleman is out of her depth in dealing with the central issues of the Forties, both in and out of the art world. One shudders to think of the innocent students who will turn to this "Chronology" for guidance about the Forties, for intellectually it is a scandal.

Anyone wanting to get some sense of what was happening to art—and to a lot else—in the Forties would be better advised to consult the two volumes of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* that John O'Brian brought out five years ago and which cover the years 1939-1949.[3] For a larger perspective on the decade, especially in the immediate aftermath of the war, one of the best guides is the special "American" number of *Horizon* that Cyril Connolly published in London in 1947. (Miss Castleman and her researchers appear never to have heard of that, either.) There is certainly more to be learned about the art of the Forties from Mr. Greenberg's contribution to that issue of *Horizon*—an essay called "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture"—than from either the muddled exhibition or the enfeebled book that Miss Castleman and her colleagues have devoted to this subject. One came away from this exhibition convinced not only that an important opportunity had been botched but that the Museum of Modern Art now lacks the intellectual resources to organize such an exhibition in a truly serious way. But "Art of the Forties" is only the latest of the recent events at MOMA to inspire such feelings.

3 See my article "Clement Greenberg in the Forties" in *The New Criterion* for January 1987.

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Academic psychobabble, or Richard Sennett goes to town

by Roger Kimball

A relation between how people view their love-making and what they experience on the street may seem farfetched.
—Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*

Anyone wishing to understand the smarmy side of American academic life would do well to reflect upon the phenomenon of Richard Sennett. Born in 1943, educated at the University of Chicago and at Harvard, where he took his Ph.D., Mr. Sennett has made a striking career of exploring the interstices existing between academic sociology, modish intellectual history, and pop social criticism of a vaguely leftist stripe. No one will accuse him of idleness. In 1969 and 1970 alone, he published four books, of which he wrote two, co-wrote one, and edited still another. He is now, after this precocious beginning, the author of a short shelf of books, including several novels, and is (as he often contrives to remind his readers) an accomplished cellist as well.

Indeed, it may be said that Mr. Sennett has never quite grown out of the post-adolescent precociousness that marked his early career, though what it might mean to describe as precocious a man nearing fifty is itself a troubling question. In any event, his later works continue to exhibit the enthusiastic blend of social psychology, misty reflection on urban planning, and countercultural angst that characterized his first efforts. His knack for coming up with arresting titles—*The Uses of Disorder* (1970), *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972), *The Fall of Public Man* (1977)—has served him well in the marketplace but to date has resulted in works that promise a good deal more than they deliver. Nevertheless, Mr. Sennett's brand of intellectual pontification has from the beginning been like catnip to the academic establishment, winning him many honors and a series of increasingly eminent posts at New York University, where he is currently Professor of Sociology and of the Humanities.

Anyone who has read Professor Sennett's earlier work will be on familiar ground in his new book, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities.*[1] Professor Sennett describes it as the third part of a trilogy that began with *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* and continued with *Palais-Royal* (1986), an epistolary novel set in nineteenth-century London and Paris that is too diffuse to be said to be about anything other than its author's sensibility. What strikes the reader about these three books is less a continuity of theme or concept—conceptual rigor has never been a prominent feature of Professor Sennett's work—than a continuity of obsessions. Perhaps his chief obsession has to do with the erotic impoverishment of modern urban life. If this sounds a trifle bizarre, recall one of Professor Sennett's few incon-

1 *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, by Richard Sennett; Knopf, 266 pages, $24.95.

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trovertible observations from *The Fall of Public Man*, to wit: "Modern ideas about the psychology of . . . private life are confused." And if, on reflection, you conclude that "farfetched" is too weak a word to describe his obsession—to describe, for example, the proposition that there is "a relation between how people view their love-making and what they experience on the street"—you would be right. But you would also thereby declare yourself a poor candidate for Sennettism. For such ideas—unctuous, unverifiable, ever so slightly embarrassing ideas—are at the heart of Professor Sennett's work. "Is there," he asks in *The Fall of Public Man*, "a difference in the expression appropriate for public relations and that appropriate for intimate relations?" The essence of Sennettism snaps into focus when you realize that Professor Sennett is not asking a rhetorical question here: he really wants to know.

This is a moment of revelation. Having just read through a large portion of Professor Sennett's oeuvre, I can report that it is not often that things snap into focus. His writing displays considerably more urgency than clarity. He deals in large, fuzzy abstractions, ill-digested theories, and highly personal *aperçus* and anecdotes. An English reviewer, writing in the late Seventies about *The Hidden Injuries of Class* and *The Fall of Public Man*, described their author as "the very type of the polymorphous-perverse American intellectual." This is correct: Professor Sennett's work and life through the Seventies were openly indebted to the apocalyptic Freudianism of polymorphists like Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. More recently he has added such perverse polymorphs as Michel Foucault to the list of influences. (*Palais-Royal,* incidentally, is dedicated to Foucault's memory.) Professor Sennett wants us, all of us, to love him; even more alarming is that he seems to want to love us back. It is incomprehensible to him that the social world should lack "intimacy," "warmth, trust, and open expression of feeling," that "the world outside," as he puts it in *The Fall of Public Man*, "seems to fail us, seems to be stale and empty." If you respond *a*) that there is no reason to expect the social world to be full of intimacy—that intimacy is best reserved for our private lives and gets along perfectly well there, thank you—and *b*) that the world does not in fact usually seem "stale and empty," then you merely reveal how much less sensitive you are than he.

What also links Professor Sennett's work to the countercultural polymorphs and intellectual gurus of the Sixties and Seventies is his attempt, as he puts it in *Authority* (1980), to establish a "connection between social-psychological analysis and political vision." Like his more philosophically-minded precursors, he loves talking about "the psychological deformation of our culture," etc. The general idea is to transform politics into a mode of therapeutic indulgence (with you-know-who holding the key to what counts as psychological health) while imputing political significance to all manner of psychological rumination, however speculative. The borders between psychology and sociology, between psychology and politics, begin to blur and mutate. And so in the end do the phenomena those disciplines and practices were originally meant to illuminate. "We see society itself as 'meaningful,'" he writes, "only by converting it into a grand psychic system." But do we? Maybe by "converting" society into a grand psychic system what we wind up with is not an understanding of society but a caricature of ourselves?

Professor Sennett has never shied away from making bold and innovative use of clichés. He early on became adept at a rhetorical gambit that the British humorist Stephen Potter recommends in his book *Lifemanship* and other works. Confronted with a given writer, Potter's amiable charlatan first finds out what quality the writer is most famous for and then blames him for not having enough of it. About D. H. Lawrence, for example, the aspiring "lifeman" delivers himself of the opinion that "the one thing lacking, of course, from D. H. Lawrence's novels was the consciousness of sexual relationship, the male and female element in life."

Professor Sennett applies an analogous

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technique in his social criticism. Worrying about the fate of social life in *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, for example, a book written at the height of the social and moral disorders of the Sixties, he prescribed—what else?—a dose of anarchy and disorder. Advising readers to "transcend the need for order," he wrote that "the freedom to accept and to live in disorder represents the goal which this generation has aimed for . . . in its search for 'community.'" "Community," indeed. At a moment when the last thing our society needed was more confusion, Professor Sennett solemnly concluded that "the great promise of city life is a new kind of confusion." In an era when hedonism and self-indulgence were the order of the day, he warned against the rise of a new "puritanism." Just when legitimate authority was breaking down throughout society, and violence and disintegration were rampant, he insisted that we allow "no policing, nor any other form of central control, of schooling, zoning, renewal, or city activities that could be performed through community actions." And while we are dreaming:

> Let us imagine a community free to create its own pattern of life, in this case a neighborhood where cheap rents were to be found, thus likely to attract young people. Here also, if the functional divisions that now operate in city life were erased, would be found whites and blacks who were blue-collar laborers, old people living in reduced circumstances, perhaps some immigrant clusters, perhaps a few small shopkeepers. Because the land use had not been rigidly zoned, all kinds of activities appropriate to cheap rents would be found—some light manufacturing, perhaps a brothel or two, many small stores, bars, and inexpensive family restaurants.

And the lion will lie down with the lamb. As always in Professor Sennett's work, the real payoff comes in the form of heightened sensitivity and enhanced fellow-feeling: "[A] disorganized city," he writes, "could encourage men to become more sensitive to each other." As, for example, they are in such models of disorganization as the South Bronx, Harlem, Watts.

Professor Sennett's use of clichés is not always so straightforward. In *The Fall of Public Man*, especially, he waxed darkly hermetic, flirting at times with total unintelligibility. Consider this "explanation" of what has happened to erotic life in the modern age:

> In the last four generations, physical love has been redefined, from terms of eroticism to terms of sexuality. . . . Eroticism meant that sexual expression transpired through actions —of choice, repression, interaction. Sexuality is not an action but a state of being, in which the physical act of love follows almost as a passive consequence, a natural result, of people feeling intimate with each other. . . .
>
> Sexuality as an expressive state, rather than an expressive act, is entropic, however. Whatever we experience must in some way touch on our sexuality, but sexuality *is*.

Savor the aroma of logic wafting up from that "however," the existential daring expressed by that italicized *is*! Not only does this passage tell us a good deal about Professor Sennett's own view of eroticism (or do we mean sexuality?), but it also recalls that earlier devotee of epistemological Sennettism: "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty told Alice, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." In fact, Professor Sennett indulges in several kinds of flapdoodle. In addition to being mystically hermetic, he is sometimes provocatively opaque, sometimes arrantly misleading, sometimes simply mistaken.

> [S]ecularity is the conviction before we die of why things are as they are, a conviction which will cease to matter of itself once we are dead.

> The terms of eroticism among the 19th Century bourgeoisie were almost entirely couched in fear, and therefore expressed through the filter of repression.

> Intimacy is an attempt to solve the public problem by denying that the public exists.

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> The closer people come, the less sociable, the more painful, the more fratricidal their relations.

How, you may ask, could a well-regarded professor of sociology, and an adult to boot, allow himself to publish such oracular nonsense? It can only be explained in the context of his larger "thesis" that capitalism and secularism "erode the sense of public life as a morally legitimate sphere." The idea being, perhaps, that if you are going to serve up a tired cliché, you had better exhaust the reader's credulity first.

It would be pleasant to report that with *The Conscience of the Eye* Professor Sennett, too, had acquired some conscience about these matters. Unfortunately, when it comes to intellectual substance his work possesses a relentless consistency. Thus the two key themes of the book are, first, that our culture suffers from a "fear of exposure" that impedes psychological growth and happiness and, second, that Christianity has perpetuated a destructive dichotomy between "inner" and "outer" experience that must be overcome. "Nothing," he tells us, "is more cursed in our culture than the continuing power of this separation. . . . Experiences like love become disturbed because feelings are kept inside, invisible—the realm where Truth is kept." Well, one can think of a few things "more cursed" in our culture, even supposing one were to admit that the separation Professor Sennett invokes *is* a curse and not simply a condition of our humanity. Just as Stephen Potter would have recommended in *Lifemanship,* Professor Sennett proposes that what our exhibitionist society needs is to cultivate an "art of exposure" in order to heal the "divide between inner, subjective experience and outer, physical life." It's the threat of puritanism redux: "This compulsive neutralizing of the environment is rooted in part in an old unhappiness, the fear of pleasure." Once again Professor Sennett concludes by recommending "difference, discontinuity, and disorientation" as "ethical forces which connect people to each other."

It is difficult to say what any of this might mean—what, for example, Professor Sennett really has in mind when he observes that "the way cities look reflects a great, unreckoned fear of exposure. . . . The fear of exposure is in one way a militarized conception of everyday experience," or that the blandness and neutrality of urban life "can be traced back to the belief that the outside world of things is unreal." How did the militarism get dragged in here? Who really believes that "the outside world of things is unreal"?

Such problems make reviewing this book like trying to review a swamp: anywhere you step you sink into a wet, oozy morass of pieties and clichés. Professor Sennett may have achieved the remarkable feat of writing the first book without a single unexceptionable sentence. But wait, there is one, on page 111: "It was Mies who built in New York in 1956-1958 the city's greatest glass tower, the Seagram Building on Park Avenue, a work of extraordinary elegance." This perceptive, straightforward judgment suggests that Professor Sennett is not without talent as an architectural critic, and that he may indeed have something to tell us about the life of cities. But it is rare that he allows that talent to surface unencumbered by jargon, sentimentality, or pretentiousness.

The Conscience of the Eye is divided into four parts ("The Eye Searches for Unity," "Interior Shadows," etc.), nine chapters ("The Refuge," "The Neutral City," "Places Full of Time," "Making Exposed Things," "Centering Oneself," etc.), and several subsections ("Nowhere," "The Grid," "The Spiritual Quest Is No Longer a Heroic Struggle," etc.). But it soon becomes clear that all such divisions are arbitrary. Professor Sennett moves freely from the Turkish baths in the East Village of New York to Balanchine's *Apollo*, from the architecture of Joseph Paxton to Machiavelli's conception of *virtú*, from the invention of the clock to one-point perspective and the obelisks Sixtus V had executed in Rome. There are ritual denunciations of capitalism and the division of labor, set pieces on various works of litera-

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ture, even a few remarks on the etiquette of taking snuff. The rubrics are like the texts or stage sets in a production by Robert Wilson: they don't really mean anything at all, though they are often suggestive of meaning.

Professor Sennett is the kind of writer, alas, who is often admired for his "range of reference." He is no mere plodding sociologist, you understand, but has read French novels, knows something about architecture, and plays the cello. He is, in short, a cultivated man. Sometimes his anecdotes or quotations are engaging, but his scholarship is invariably second- or third-hand. As it happens, his "breadth" is everywhere compromised by a stunning superficiality. A few phrases about Brunelleschi, a coy allusion to deconstruction, some misleading clichés about Christianity: it is intellectual history via free association. When not retailing stories about walking around this or that city, he is appropriating and misappropriating such sources as Hannah Arendt—who, we are told, failed "to connect" with people because (unlike James Baldwin) she lacked sympathy and because her writing lacks "the art of exposure." (Poor Hannah Arendt!)

No one, at any rate, will claim that Professor Sennett's work is unexposed. From the tiniest detail to the most sweeping observation there is something suspect about his work. And in *The Conscience of the Eye* he has outdone even himself. He begins the book by telling us that "The ancient Greek could use his or her eyes to see the complexities of life." Hmmm. Well, yes, so what? Hasn't a modern Greek or New Yorker got eyes, too? Apparently not. "It would be difficult," he continues, "to know where in particular to go in modern London or New York to experience, say, remorse." Of course it would. But where would one go in medieval London or fifth-century Athens to experience, say, remorse?

In fact, almost everything Professor Sennett says or implies about "the Greeks" is garbled or just plain wrong. He claims that today it is not "easy to conceive places that teach the moral dimensions of sexual desire, as the Greeks learned in their gymnasiums—modern places, that is, filled with other people, a crowd of other people, rather than the near silence of the bedroom or the solitude of the psychiatrist's couch." But whatever Professor Sennett's fantasies about it, the Greeks used their *gymnasium* primarily as a place for athletic training, not sex education. Surely even Professor Sennett will admit that there is a difference. It's the same with his efforts to decorate his argument with Greek terms. He praises the paradigmatic classical virtue of *sophrysune*, telling us that it "could be translated as 'grace' or 'poise.'" But it couldn't, or shouldn't. *Sophrysune* means "moderation" or "prudence," not "grace" (for which the common Greek word is *charis*). In Professor Sennett's vocabulary, practicing the virtue of *sophrysune* is what "we" would call being "'centered.'" Actually, we would not, because this would be to read the classical term in the image of late-twentieth-century psychobabble, to graft the sensibility of Shirley MacLaine onto the ethical thought of Plato and Aristotle. Again, Professor Sennett assures us that "The result of caring about what one sees is the desire to make something. The Greeks called this desire *poesis*." Leaving aside the general contention (is it true, after all, that caring about what one sees necessarily results in a desire to make something?), the fact is that *poesis* has nothing to do with "desire": it means making or fabrication.

Part of what makes *The Conscience of the Eye* such a bad book is Professor Sennett's inveterate tendency to romanticize everything but his own culture: the past, the Greeks, other cultures, you name it. "The Renaissance man and woman," we read, "literally saw time take shape in everyday life in the city." Meaning—what? But prodigies were everywhere before inner became separated from outer and people had lost "the art of exposure." Consider the ancient Hebrews: "The people of the Old Testament," Professor Sennett writes, "did not separate spiritual life and worldly experience. Like the Greeks, their everyday existence seemed to them

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filled with divine plagues, the miraculous parting of seas, voices speaking from burning bushes." Were they all of them on drugs, then? One would have thought that a professional sociologist and intellectual historian would have developed some basic competence in reading religious texts, and would have understood that there is a difference between myth and reality, between divine revelation and everyday life.

While he is critical of the "weight of the medieval past upon the present" because that medieval past is bound up with Christianity, Professor Sennett nonetheless finds much to romanticize in the domestic arrangements of our medieval forebears. He speaks warmly of a time when "the same room could serve as a place to eat, to defecate, to do business and to sleep." How authoritarian, how cold our modern houses seem in comparison, divided as they are into "domestic duchies" in which "love, play, sociality" each has its allotted space, and "each of these subjective spaces [is] in turn removed from the spaces of the body—the kitchen, the toilet, the bathroom." It's that unwanted separation between inner and outer again, you see. "[I]n a home, adults were to be . . . trained how and where to separate the functioning of their bodies from contact with other people; how to make love in the silence and darkness of a room furnished to that end; how to behave when received into a parlor as opposed to a more informal sitting room." Thank God for all that! you might say. At times, though, one wants to assure the author: "Really, Dick, it's OK to keep the lights on if you want."

The other side of this penchant for romanticizing "the other" is the habit of disparaging the familiar. "The spaces full of people in the modern city," Professor Sennett writes, "are either spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating consumption, like the shopping mall, or spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating the experience of tourism." But what about churches, concert halls, community centers, town halls, or local parks? Are they all necessarily "orchestrating" consumption or tourism? Only if you've got a bad case of Sennettism will it seem so.

Professor Sennett's narrative is also marked by little eruptions of what has come to be called politically correct thinking. Thus he maunders on about diversity and "difference as a positive human value." "We need," he writes in his introduction, "to see differences on the streets or in other people neither as threats nor as sentimental invitations, rather as necessary visions." As usual with the politically correct, however, only certain previously certified expressions of "difference" or diversity are to be encouraged. Discussing the area of midtown Manhattan around Rockefeller Center (which he criticizes for too much "sobriety" and describes as "an abcess in the city"), Professor Sennett takes aim at St. Patrick's Cathedral and its surrounding buildings: a luxury tower to the north, Saks Fifth Avenue to the south. "This confection," he informs us, "cannot be said to be loved by all New Yorkers, at least not by many who are black or sick." What, are there no Catholics who are black or ill? But the real target of his complaint is not the architecture or urban fabric of the neighborhood but Cardinal O'Connor. "The current cardinal is a prominent opponent of the large homosexual community in New York," Professor Sennett tells us. "His enemies charge that his morality has led him to neglect charity . . . since the cardinal refuses to encourage the use of condoms during sexual intercourse." Never mind that Cardinal O'Connor is not an opponent—prominent or otherwise—of the homosexual community in New York any more than he is an opponent of any other group in the city: Professor Sennett simply doesn't like the moral teachings of the Catholic church and is at pains here to establish his political *bona fides* about the matter. It seems never to have occurred to him that what he extols as "a disoriented community" and so on is regarded by many as an invitation to chaos and moral collapse. It must also be said that Professor Sennett's travesty of Christianity and complete obtuseness about the role that the Christian tradition has played in creating many of the things he claims to cherish reduce his lucubrations about social life to a parody of radical-chic sociologese.

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Indeed, his eagerness to be on the fashionable side of every question leads Professor Sennett into some positively silly judgments. The last sections of his book are meant to describe alternatives to the "neutral" modern city we have come to inhabit because of our fear of exposure and, of course, because of the breach between inner and outer. As in earlier works, Professor Sennett recommends "the experience of complexity" as an antidote to the sterility around us. What sort of complexity does he have in mind? It may be taken as axiomatic that politically correct intellectuals such as Professor Sennett approve of graffiti, and, indeed, the epidemic of graffiti that hit New York City in the Sixties is one thing he croons about. He is outraged that "The graffiti were treated from the first as a crime," though when you describe it as defacing public property it doesn't sound quite so odd. "I often saw this graffiti in my mind's eye," Professor Sennett confides, "when I listened to my son play the violin." (What this says about his son's violin playing is something that seems to have escaped him.)

Professor Sennett has other examples of beneficent urban complexity. There is his peaen to Fourteenth Street in Manhattan, for example. Professor Sennett seems especially taken with that bit of Fourteenth Street between Fourth Avenue and Sixth Avenue—the bit crowded with cheap stores, street vendors hawking wares of questionable provenance, rip-off artists, bums, pushers, and other attractions redolent of "the kind of complexity suggested by the term 'otherness.'" Comparing the experience to something created by Palladio (only "without much reflection"), he rejoices that "here is an interacting crowd." In fact, such places token naught but the economic and social decay of the city, yet Professor Sennett is too busy championing "disruptive nonlinear experience" to notice.

The deeper problem with *The Conscience of the Eye* is that it lacks a conscience for the truth. Professor Sennett presents himself as a species of urban historian and social moralist. His real role in these pages, however, is as a kind of fabulist recording—and perhaps exorcising—his personal demons. In this sense, he is right that *The Conscience of the Eye* should be seen as the third part of a trilogy that began with *The Fall of Public Man* and *Palais-Royal*. We can see that he has moved from sociological speculation to historical recreation to intellectual fantasy. Professor Sennett wants to find love in the "impersonal world" of modern urban life; it is not surprising that he should decide that E. M. Forster's injunction "only connect" "takes a surprising turn" when applied to strangers. In the end, Professor Sennett's enthusiasms condemn him to unhappiness with the modern city precisely because the city is not an extension of his own psyche—and, indeed, may even at times offer serious resistance to his blandishments. On the question of what Professor Sennett actually explains in this book, as in so much else that he has written, one recalls Nietzsche's observation about mystical explanations: not only are they not deep, they are not even shallow.

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Desmond MacCarthy's familiar criticism

by Joseph Epstein

Poor Desmond MacCarthy—so gifted, so charming, so full of promise—never quite came off. To be considered promising when young is at best a mixed blessing. Edith Wharton claimed that, as a young woman of her day, one of her greatest benefits was in never having been considered promising at all: it gave her time to develop in her own way and outside the pressure of expectation. Desmond MacCarthy never lived outside that pressure, and applied a good bit of it on himself. His aim, the assumption others made about him, was that he would one day create some masterpiece of literature—perhaps a richly complex novel or a key work of imperishable criticism—that would both make his mark and redeem his promise. He never did it; never, in fact, even came close.

Desmond MacCarthy stands in what is by now almost a tradition in England of literary flops. Just before him there was J. C. Squire, his predecessor as literary editor of *The New Statesman*, and following him were Cyril Connolly and Kenneth Tynan. Each in his day came down from Oxbridge laden with talent and marked for early success. Each knew what was expected of him. MacCarthy and Connolly came near to making a success of failure. Connolly even wrote books about his inability to write books. (In one of his doggerel poems, Edmund Wilson wrote: "Cyril Connolly / Behaves rather fonnily: / Whether folks are at peace or fighting, / He complains that it keeps him from writing.") "We are admirably successful failures," Desmond MacCarthy wrote to J. C. Squire before the Second World War, when both were coming to the end of their careers.

About success there seems something inevitable, easily explained after the fact, and often a touch boring. In autobiography, surely, interest begins to flag once success arrives. Failure, where it is not grinding and dreary (as in life, admittedly, it all too often is), provides a speculative mind richer material, especially where all the ingredients for success were in place to begin with. Where failure is owing to early death of the kind that has a strong element of self-destruction in it—as, notably, in the American instances of F. Scott Fitzgerald and James Agee—interest is practically guaranteed. But even without the heightened drama lent by early death, the failure of the truly talented suggests questions that speak directly to the mysteries of fate and destiny. Which was the road not taken? How might things have worked out otherwise? Was it all written in the stars, as the astrologers insist, or in the DNA, where the geneticists find it, or in the first years of life, where the Freudians think they have discovered it? I have no wish to disparage success (I have been planning a small success of my own for some years now), yet it is well to remember that it takes a certain not easily defined talent to record an interesting failure.

Desmond MacCarthy was born in 1877, "half-Irish," as John Gross has written, "quarter-German, quarter-French, wholly

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Etonian." He was an only child, which may have been part of the problem. His mother, who was twenty-one years younger than her husband, was a garrulous woman, romantic and of high pretension, the daughter of a German aristocrat who had failed to make good on his aspiration to achieve fame as a writer and philosopher. She was long-lived and devoted to her son in a not always felicitous way, encouraging him to ascend the heights at the same time that she regularly cut the emotional ground out from under him. His father, a man of the steady habits befitting the bank manager that he was, noted the absence of similar steadiness in Desmond. When the boy was seventeen and still at Eton, he wrote: "You have the disadvantage of being an only child, and it may be that you have the germ of a slight mental weakness, as I have noticed that you still have the nursery habit of dropping things anywhere without thinking of the trouble you are giving."

In *Clever Hearts*, their biography of Desmond MacCarthy and his wife Molly, Hugh and Mirabel Cecil write that both Desmond's parents invested great hope in their son.[1] "Their conviction that they had a remarkable child lay at the root of his own belief that he would one day be a great man—a politician, a sage, a doctor of genius—which later developed into the belief that he could write a great novel." What we have here, as no therapist I have known or have heard about has ever said, is perhaps a case of too much love in the home.

Desmond MacCarthy was able to command as well a great deal of love outside the home. His were not among those typically nightmarish school days that have by now become one of the standard clichés of English writers who came of age late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries. He was no sickly E. M. Forster—of whose novels he would later hold a low opinion—a child of quivering sensitivity crushed by normally brutish boys of eleven and twelve. Nor were his school days at all like those of George Orwell, who found school to consist chiefly of snobbery and bullying and who took school for life and so lived at odds with his society forever after.

No, Desmond's school days—and henceforth I shall refer to him as "Desmond," for intimacy was his keynote as a writer—no, Desmond's school days were almost uniformly pleasant. At Eton, as at the preparatory school he attended between the ages of seven and eleven, he was good at games, efficient enough at his studies, quick to make friends, and withal an immensely attractive boy and young man. "It was at Cambridge that I acquired such faculties as I have possessed of making the most of life," he later wrote in a paper for the Memoir Club, "and at Eton the worldly experience which may be a blessing or a snare." Very early in his life, one's guess is, Desmond, as he wrote of his friend Roger Fry, came to believe "in the wisdom of being happy."

Desmond began his career at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1894. This was well beyond the time of religious crisis among English undergraduates and just before the time of pervasive homosexuality among the aesthetically cultivated, which, the Cecils say, set in with the advent of Lytton Strachey, whose undergraduate career began in 1899. Desmond slipped into Cambridge life as into a warm and welcoming pool; his congenial nature, good looks, intellectual quickness and curiosity all combined to assure him a place in the best circles of undergraduate life. This, in Cambridge, inevitably meant the Apostles, that select and secret society election to which was said to depend upon the possession of the intellectual graces and good character. Desmond was offered membership in 1896.

At Cambridge Desmond read history and looked into everything else that struck his fancy. He was invited to attend the weekly symposium of the classicist and political philosopher Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (of whom E. M. Forster wrote a biography,

1 *Clever Hearts: Desmond and Molly MacCarthy, A Biography*, by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil; Victor Gollancz (London), 320 pages, £18.95.

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in which he neglected to mention that Dickinson's idea of a good time included having young men with dirty boots stand upon his chest). The later-to-be successful historian George Trevelyan and his brother Robert, the later-to-be failed poet, were among his closest friends. The philosopher G. E. Moore, who was three years older than Desmond, was another close friend. Moore's stringent intellectual standards and his doctrine of moral purity, as exemplified through honesty in personal relations, aesthetic emotions, and the pursuit of truth, were to become a continuous if mixed influence upon him. The chief literary influences on Desmond at this time were Henry James, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy; add to these Samuel Butler, whom he had met through his father when still a boy.

At Cambridge, too, Desmond got his first whiff of intellectual bohemianism. He acquired it through invitation to the Sunday evening salon of Oscar Browning, a don famous in his day, whose penchant for titled undergraduates and interest in the education of the poor demonstrate yet again that snobbery and left-wing sentimentalism can live snugly together in a capacious breast. But then everywhere he went doors opened for Desmond, who now began to add to his other attributes a justified reputation as a charming talker and courteous listener. Desmond, as an old friend once described him, was "a man who travelled first class through life on a third class ticket."

Desmond's father had it in mind for his son to read for the law. After his father's death this notion was dropped, and there was talk of his taking an examination for a clerkship in the House of Lords, which figured to open up the prospect of a career in public life. Around this time Desmond also planned a second degree, this one in philosophy, with G. E. Moore as his tutor. But the examination for the clerkship was never taken, and the degree in philosophy dropped, when Desmond decided that he wanted to be a writer. He made this decision while traveling in Europe, where he discovered a talent for idleness and a taste for the spectatorial. His mother, who bombarded him with letters throughout his life, began to doubt his perseverance and wrote him in the following all-too-prophetic terms:

> I do not think you have genius. I think you have *grt* feeling & understanding of the powers & greatness & genius in others, which is clever and delicious & will make yr life always interesting & delightful even in *yr most* despondent moments, but I do not think you have any creative power nor have you endurance enough to be a *grt* man. All those things show very early in people. Talent is always *there*—it does not grow suddenly—it grows rapidly but from the instant the child is born. You are in matter of thinking and appreciation rather above the average & that tempts you and others, those who love you, to be led to think at *first* you are much more clever than you are.

Desmond's reply is itself most interesting:

> I think what you say about my literary power is quite true. I have neither the facility [n]or the energy to make a good easy living by writing. I should be further handicapped by fastidiousness—not one of the necessary qualities of a successful journalist. I know I sometimes write well, but with regard to real talent, I am, I expect, even more doubtful than you.

Desmond was then only twenty-one. He began to plan his novel. He set out in the meanwhile to widen his literary acquaintance, both in reading and among personages. He often visited Samuel Butler, met with Wilfrid Blunt and Leslie Stephen, and first encountered Henry James, whom he much admired, in 1901. He was living in London with his mother; owing to poor investments, the money his father had left was much diminished, forcing everyone to live on a fairly short leash. Desmond, though, was never one to recognize leashes of any length, and spent lavishly on cigars, clothes, and cabs.

Between 1899 and 1903—between, that is, the ages of twenty-two and twenty-six—Des-

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mond attempted to get his great novel off the ground. That he had little success oughtn't to surprise. Few impressive novels of large scope have been written by writers in their twenties; it is well to recall that Joseph Conrad published his first novel at thirty-nine. But all the while that Desmond thought he was writing a novel, he was in reality training to become a critic. In the collection of essays published in 1931 under the title *Portraits* he wrote to the book's dedicatee, himself at the age of twenty-two, the following note:

> Some day, when you came upon a hushed space in life, away from journalism, away from the hubbub of personal emotions, I know you fully intended to listen to yourself; and discovering what you thought about the world to project it into a work of art—a play, a novel, a biography. But confess, you were too careless to prepare that preliminary silence, and too indolent to concentrate. Meanwhile how delightful you found it to imbibe literature at your leisure! And so you read and read. I must say I was grateful to you afterwards, for as a critic I should have run dry long ago if you had not been so lazy.

Nietzsche says that "a married philosopher belongs *in comedy*" but marriage and children for a writer of grand ambition can sometimes be tragic. Desmond had begun writing reviews before his marriage, but his marriage, in 1906, to Molly Warre-Cornish and the birth of children in fairly quick succession—three children in four years—pretty much locked him into journalism for life. Molly MacCarthy's was a most interesting family, and she was herself an impressive person. Her father was vice-provost and librarian of Eton; her Aunt Anny was Thackeray's daughter; and her mother, Blanche, the spiritual head of the household, used to say: "In all disagreeable circumstances remember three things which I always say to myself: 'I am an Englishwoman; I was born in wedlock; I am on dry land.'" Molly, under the name Mary MacCarthy, wrote a charming little volume about her family titled *A Nineteenth Century Childhood* and novels that met with commercial success and kind words from Virginia Woolf. In *A Nineteenth Century Childhood* Molly wrote of Desmond: "He seems to have unlimited time, and though he strolls through life as if it were a vast exhibition, at any booth of which he can tarry as long as it pleases his fancy, he never appears in the least demoralized by leisure; though there are grave headshakings over his 'career.' Everyone may be concerned about him, but he quietly goes his own way."

Molly, when writing that passage, knew considerably less than the half of it. *Clever Hearts*, the Cecils' biography, is in good part the story of the MacCarthys' marriage, and a sorely sad story it is. Most of the sadness in the marriage, in the Cecils' persuasive version, was owing to Desmond. Although the marriage was at the outset felt to be a great love match—Henry James attended the wedding, at which Donald Tovey played Brahms, Schumann, and Beethoven, and G. E. Moore was best man—it wasn't long before troubles of a Bloomsburyish kind set in. Bertrand Russell, who seems to have tried his luck with every attractive woman he ever met, put his moves on Molly, who found him laughable; at any rate the Cecils report that she could not keep a straight face. Desmond kept a very straight face during the love affairs into which he entered, which were always crushing to his wife. When in later years Clive Bell, another persistent Bloomsbury seducer, set his sights on Molly, who was a most attractive woman, she, agreeing to give in, caused Desmond great sorrow. The much vaunted Bloomsbury emphasis on truth and freedom in personal relations, in the sexual realm, only makes sense, if at all, when the people involved do not really love each other. Molly and Desmond did love each other, and so, playing under Bloomsbury rules, marital life, or at least much of it, turned out to be hell.

Apostolic succession in Desmond's day led from Cambridge to Bloomsbury. Of the ten men who were members of what Leonard Woolf called "Old Bloomsbury," only three —Clive Bell, Adrian Stephen, and Duncan Grant—were not Apostles, and the others

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overlapped while at Cambridge. All were in one way or another under the sway of G. E. Moore and his *Principia Ethica*, which gave them what John Maynard Keynes called "a religion." Bloomsbury has by now, through being over-written about by academics, become Boresbury, and so perhaps the time has come to sheer away the snobbery that has always been at the center of interest in it and see it for the often dreary, just as often comical, spectacle it provided.

The shabby and milquetoasty E. M. Forster; the etiolated Lytton Strachey, looking for all the world as if he had walked out of an Aubrey Beardsley drawing; the lubricious Clive Bell, always on the make; the suave Maynard Keynes, informing governments that they need not worry about balancing budgets while himself shoring up a fortune in the stock market; the Stephen sisters, living lives that will no doubt one day be portrayed on the screen by the Redgrave girls; and off a bit to the side, that strange creature, fit by physique for an aviary, Lady Ottoline Morrell (Lady Omega Muddle, as Lytton Strachey called her)—they were quite a collection of human types, these Bloomsberries.

And Desmond MacCarthy was not the least exotic among them. As he grew older, Desmond grew seedier, so that Virginia Woolf, in her diary in 1928, could describe him as "like a man who has sat up all night in a third class railway carriage. His fingers are stained yellow with cigarettes. One tooth in the lower jaw is missing. His hair is dank. His eye more than ever dubious. He has a hole in his blue sock." Yet Virginia Woolf would also say that she wasn't sure but that Desmond hadn't "the nicest nature of any of us—the nature one would have chosen for one's own." She spoke, too, of hoping one day to make up a short book of his table talk, "which shall appear as a proof to the younger generation that Desmond was the most gifted of us all. But why did he never do anything? they will ask."

There was no shortage of witnesses to attest to Desmond's charm. Lady Ottoline Morrell thought him "full of human kindness and generosity." Leonard Woolf, not a man given to effusions, called Desmond "perhaps the most charming man I have known." The flow of his conversation was famous, and a legendary story attesting to it has to do with his performance one evening, at the studio of Duncan Grant, where it was Desmond's turn to read a prepared paper to the Memoir Club. He proceeded to read an immensely fluent little memoir, from an attaché case that was open on his lap, when the attaché case fell to the floor and, as E. M. Forster recounted after Desmond's death, it was discovered that the case was quite empty. Without a hem, without a haw, Desmond was beautifully making it all up as he went along.

That little anecdote is interesting on more than one count. It reveals not only Desmond's talent as a talker, but his propensity for procrastination. Great as the former was, the latter may have been even greater. He was famous among his friends, and infamous among editors and printers, for his unreliability. Socially as well as editorially, he could be depended upon to be late, or not to show up at all. Frances Partridge, in her diary, referred to "MacCarthyism" as a combination of "the utmost charm and the utmost lack of consideration." Not easy on poor Molly, this little tic of her husband's. He left her with other worries into the bargain: over his long absences in London, over getting his work done, over money. In 1912, when Desmond was thirty-five, Molly wrote to him: "You will turn me into a morose, nagging, peevish, lonely woman—disillusioned & disappointed—and our children will wonder *why* you can't give them a better time, as other Fathers do who have made careers, or have honours, if not wealth, and will think of you as a lazy old man." She closed: "Don't be too angry at my outburst—I love you always but am utterly unstrung by care & loss of faith in you. Send some hope."

Desmond was himself running out of hope. After various odd and short-lived editorial jobs, he was free-lancing, which is no job for the unpunctual and temperamen-

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tally unsteady. Feeling the need to find regular work, he wrote to Lady Ottoline: "To accomplish such a thing will be the extinguisher to smouldering ambitions, but anything is better than smouldering without breaking into flame. I have smouldered now for fourteen years—a long time to smoulder, too long to smoulder." The following year, 1913, he signed on as a drama critic at *The New Statesman*, probably at the recommendation of George Bernard Shaw. But steady work did not put out the coals of ambition. Throughout Desmond's career ambitious projects would be taken up and never quite gotten underway: a play and then a book about John Donne, a book about Byron, another about Tolstoy. And then there was the novel, always the damn novel. Lytton Strachey once read the first chapter of the novel and found it "not very inspiring."

What, really, went wrong? Why couldn't this most talented of men produce anything that seemed worthy of his gifts? It would be convenient to say that there are the pleasures of life and the pleasures of work, and Desmond, given a choice, invariably chose the former. But in fact he was full of guilt, recriminations, a sense of waste. Doubtless he found much delight—and doubtless, too, gave even more—chatting away amongst the rich and smart, but at an evening's end there was his own melancholy to face. Once, comparing himself to Bertrand Russell, Desmond noted: "You see my despondencies come from not feeling up to life, his from not feeling life up to him." Another time quoting Coleridge's son Hartley, who wrote of having "lost the race I never ran," Desmond remarked, "That will do very nicely for my own epitaph and I knew it would rather early."

In *Beginning Again*, the third volume of his autobiography, Leonard Woolf discusses at some length Desmond's sad failure to live up to his promise. Woolf eschews the notion that Desmond talked away his talent, saying that 1.) it "is probably true to say that 'his special gift of conversation' was a cause of his not writing novels, and 2.) his not writing novels was a cause of his special gift of conversation." Woolf thought it went deeper than that, however. He recalled that Desmond had once told him he thought he suffered from a disease: "the moment he knew that he ought to do something, no matter what that something was, he felt absolutely unable to do it and would do anything else in order to prevent himself from doing it." Desmond once asked Woolf to lock him in a room until he had completed his work on an introduction to the posthumous novel of his friend A. F. Wedgwood. Woolf did, letting Desmond out only to trot off to buy cigarettes, but he doubts that the job finally got done even under conditions of voluntary incarceration.

Leonard Woolf thought, too, that Desmond operated under yet another pressure, and this was that of high perfectionism. This, Woolf felt, was probably instilled in him by G. E. Moore, or what he earlier calls "Moorism," which set the stakes of artistic creation very high indeed. Desmond's own standards in this line were themselves quite lofty. As he demonstrated time and again as a critic, when it came to literature, he knew what the real thing looked like and he knew quite a bit about how it was done, too. He just couldn't do it himself. It was the story of his life, and a very unhappy story it is.

Yet another, perhaps stranger, factor has to be weighed in considering Desmond's inability to produce the great work everyone expected of him: he was too adept at enjoying life to have much need for the compensations that go with the production of art. In a lovely memoiristic essay he wrote about Henry James, Desmond tells about James, resting with coffee at the close of a party of which he, James, had clearly been the life, noting the rest of the party going off onto the verandah, and James remarking to him, "What a charming picture they make, the women there with their embroidery, the . . . " Desmond noted the immense detachment in James's voice as he said this, and it caused him to blurt out, "I can't bear to look at life like that. I want to be in everything. Perhaps that is why I cannot *write*, it makes me feel

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absolutely alone." At this James leaned forward, grasped Desmond's arm excitedly, and said, "Yes, it is solitude. If it runs after you and catches you, well and good. But for heaven's sake don't run after *it*. It is absolute solitude." Desmond's confession may seem that of a weakling, but it has honesty in it, and lacerating self-awareness, given that he stood in no greater awe of anyone than the genuine artist. Yet the sad truth remained that he liked life too much to give up its quotidian enjoyments for the delayed and very high-risk gratifications required by the most serious art.

Desmond had no recourse but to fall back onto journalism, which Leonard Woolf called "the opiate of the artist" and which for Cyril Connolly was one of "the enemies of promise." Put in these terms, journalism sounds like a low and miserable condition to which no one should fall. Although Desmond referred to himself as a literary journalist, knowing full well that the term had less prestige than that of artist or critic, it is well to remember on how high a level his own literary journalism was pitched. Written chiefly in the form of drama or book reviews, and occasionally as essays for literary journals—much of it done on the run and under the pressure of frantic threatening deadlines—it is surprising how much of it today not only remains readable but continues to give pleasure and insight, qualities most writers today would settle for and all too few are able to provide.

How did Desmond do it? It will not quite do to state the obvious: he did it through intelligence, charm, and skill, even though he had all three in large supply. Desmond also had a very keen sense of what he was about. Toward the close of a brilliant essay on Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, he wrote:

> Yes, it is difficult for a critic not to believe sometimes that his own mind and his own feelings are more interesting to the reader than his subject, and on occasion it may even be true; but certainly if that is his constant persuasion he can be no critic—an essayist perhaps, but not a critic.

Desmond MacCarthy was an essayist, but one who for the most part required a play or book—some event or artifact of culture—to set him going. He was, moreover, a familiar essayist, in the sense that his tone is entirely, deliciously conversational. Desmond was himself not only a great talker, as all who knew him attested, but both a lover and a connoisseur of good talk. Certainly, he had heard more than his share of the best talk of his time. Of Asquith, Desmond writes that "many men's writing is the spoken word on paper, merely titivated conversation. But he actually spoke the language of the pen." Of the distinguished Liberal statesman Sir William Harcourt, he recalls his having had "the gift of effective assertion"; of Gladstone, that he wrote "spoken sentences, not written ones, composed with a pen by a man imagining himself in the act of writing." And on Henry James he was best of all:

> The spell he exercised by his style was exercised in his conversation. Phrases of abstruse exaggerated drollery or of the last intellectual elegance flowered in it profusely. At first you might feel rather conscience-striken for having set in motion, perhaps by a casual question, such tremendous mental machinery. It seemed really too bad to have put him to such trouble, made him work and weigh his words like that; . . . There was something at once so painstaking, serious and majestical in the procedure of his mind that you shrank from diverting it, and thus the whole of your little precious time with him might be wasted. This often happened in my case during our fifteen years' acquaintance, and I still regret those bungled opportunities.

Desmond's own conversation, by all accounts, was less idiosyncratic, less pyrotechnical. His was the gift neither of epigram nor of repartee. Max Beerbohm, soon after Desmond's death in 1952, recalled the "endearing intimacy" of his voice and said that his talk was essentially "chamber music," for he was very good at bringing other people into the conversation. "He was also," Beerbohm said, "a great user of that attractive, that beguiling phrase 'And tell me.'" Beerbohm

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concludes that "writing was always to him a task and rather a terror. And that is perhaps the reason why he wrote so splendidly. He had always to do his best." Desmond's best, when he hit it, which was fairly often, was splendid.

One has only to read Desmond MacCarthy on such writers as Joseph Conrad, Henry James, or Marcel Proust to know one is in the company of a man for whom literature is essential to life. He wrote brilliantly on almost all writers that he took up, though never definitively. He seems not to have been interested in the last word; only in having his say. He was less authoritative in tone than authentic in interest, more the connoisseur than the critic. A Desmond MacCarthy essay of any length is likely to include a digression or two ("I distrust the delicacy of the delicate," he writes in his essay on Proust), a bit of autobiography ("I was companionable without exciting envy," he writes about his relationship with Wilfrid Blunt), a statement of bias ("As a rule I find myself in agreement with orthodox opinion upon great writers and tend to feel uneasy when I am not," he notes. "But with [Samuel] Richardson I differ jubilantly"), and if one knows a bit about his life one can read Desmond's own predicament into his judgments upon others ("No man was ever more acutely conscious of himself than Boswell, and therefore more powerfully aware of being a bundle of confused and contradictory impulses. His will was naturally weak . . . and he longed passionately to pull himself together").

What Desmond MacCarthy finally wrote is what I should call familiar criticism. Edmund Wilson once remarked that the "implied position of the people who know about literature (as is also the case in every other art) is simply that they know what they know, and that they are determined to impose their opinions by main force of eloquence or assertion on the people who do not know." In Desmond MacCarthy's criticism force, main or otherwise, simply isn't brought to bear. In his criticism one reads a man who also knows what he knows but doesn't seem to want to impose anything on anyone. He prefers instead to talk about it, almost as if in a pleasant social setting. Much of what he has to report is by way of appreciation, but appreciation need not preclude penetration. On Joseph Conrad, Desmond wrote:

> Many passages express directly what his stories exhibit imaginatively: a judgment which is passionately ethical and a conception of nature as indifferent to human values. In a universe, beautiful in an inscrutable way, but without justice and honour, it is man's glory to have put justice and honour. . . . There is no occasion for despair, for in defeat man also is great, and the spectacle of the struggle is sublime to the contemplating mind. Conrad then has no "message." He has . . . a philosophy of life, but it is not the kind which drives a man to win converts. . . . I think it was because he had seen so many things in human nature and the world that he did not wish to be forgotten or to forget, that Conrad, to our great gain, became a writer.

An interest in human nature was at the heart of Desmond's own passion for literature. He thought human nature far and away the subject of greatest fascination, and literature provided the best insights into it. The words "human nature" show up repeatedly in his criticism, and in a discourse entitled "Notes on The Novel" he wrote: "Goethe, Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire, Arnold—if you examine what they have written . . . you will be surprised to find how much of their criticism is discourse upon human nature and upon good and evil." Desmond believed, with Vernon Lee, whom he quoted upon the subject, that "'tis his human superiority, not, believe me, his literary talent" that makes a great writer. He loved literature, and knew it in its intricacies, but never took it altogether as an end in itself. As he wrote in "Notes on The Novel":

> In a work of literary art these questions [What do I really care about? What Art? God? Men? Myself?], and a hundred more, find an answer, though they are not necessarily asked

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> in it. But on the pertinacity with which the artist has put them to himself depend the clearness and depth of his vision; and if he can only reach down to what he has really felt himself, that vision will carry with it an imposing authority for others, possess also a kind of unity which, though philosophically it is no pledge of truth, is nevertheless capable of giving much greater satisfaction to the mind than piecemeal observation of separate truths ever can.

I hope I haven't defanged Desmond MacCarthy, made him seem a critic without any true bite. Geoffrey Grigson took this general line when he wrote about "the Desmond MacCarthy streak in English letters," by which he meant, roughly, bland appreciation. Desmond could be quite tough. As a drama critic, he could kill an entire genre in a single phrase, or at least he has for me in one instance by referring to "the enforced joy of musical comedy." He referred to the misogyny at the heart of Strindberg as "the torments of a hen-pecked Bluebeard." He was death on *Ulysses*, which he thought the creation "of a frightened enslaved mind. Much of it is cold, nasty, small and overserious." He early set himself not to be among those blackmailed by the avant-garde. "The threat is a potent one," he wrote. "All dissidents or doubtfuls are warned that if they are not duly respectful towards the new enormities, they will find themselves numbered among the philistines who, in the past, derided and rejected 'the unknown beauty.'"

Desmond found himself temperamentally at odds with much in modern writing. It was the modern note of self-dramatization that put him off. "I see no reason to suppose that good works of art may not be produced by those whose conflicts and 'efforts toward freedom' are over at the time of writing." Nietzsche's writings were similarly spoiled for him "by being obviously cathartic." His complaint about much modern poetry, from T. S. Eliot on, is that it was taken away from common readers and placed, firmly and forever, in the hands of academics and professionals. "The root of my distrust of the modern movement is that by implication and example it dethrones poetry from the place it has held in the common life of man." Too much of the art of his time reminded him "that art is so superficial, life so profound."

It was the connections between art and life that were most important to him. "It is extremely doubtful whether the aim of the novel is to make an aesthetic appeal," he wrote apropos of Trollope. "Passages in it may do so; but it aims also at satisfying our curiosity about life and engaging our sympathies quite as much as at satisfying the aesthetic sense." More than once he made plain that for him "a work of art whatever its theme must somehow, somewhere, suggest the desirability of life."

Desmond allowed that every writer is in good part the product of the spirit of the time in which he comes into maturity, and that in this regard he was of the time before the First World War. He felt that in the twentieth century fiction was coming to seem more like biography and biography like fiction. ("A biographer," he wrote, "is an artist who is on oath, and anyone who knows anything about artists, knows that this is almost a contradiction in terms.") As he grew older, he worried less about consistency of taste. "Surely we are all gifted with a happy natural inconsistency of taste," he wrote in response to F. R. Leavis's attempts to exclude so much of oddity and interest in literary creation. For Desmond "the important thing is to respond to greatness when we meet it, and to deplore incessantly its absence does not increase our power of response." Neither a law-giver nor a disciple-maker, Desmond MacCarthy was essentially a commonsensical critic.

What made him an uncommon critic, in my view, was his style, his imagination, his impressive understanding of how literature worked, which he knew if not quite from the inside then at least as someone who sorely wanted inside. Desmond knew, as Logan Pearsall Smith said, that style was the "preservative of literature"; and also, if the truth be known, of criticism. His own style was fluent and mellifluous, approximating his talk. (Cyril Connolly spoke of the

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"wonderful flute of his conversation.") His was a style that worked toward the aphoristic, and often achieved it. "Society changes quickly; the soul hardly at all; it is that which makes [Ibsen's] work permanent." Apropos of the artistic temperament, he wrote: "To achieve self-portraiture a man must be self-complacent and detached." He could also bring off the aphoristic style in longer passages:

> Figures of literature and history live in the thoughts of men on the condition that they change their aspect. Humanity is only interested in past ages and dead authors in so far as it can attribute to them its own passions and thoughts. That they are to go on doing so—seeing now this, now that, in them—is the sign and proof of an immortal creation.

Although Desmond himself wrote so well, he never forgot the limitations of style, or where in literature it simply did not much matter. Goethe, he wrote, "is too interested in truth to be afraid of being dull." Balzac's "work seems to show that the art of writing well is of subordinate importance in novel writing." Desmond thought stream of consciousness misbegotten as a method of accurately recording "a streamy-dreamy state of semi-consciousness," and referred to its use in *Ulysses* as "a tiresome method of conveying the sensation of a snooze." Yet he knew, as he said in connection with Joyce, that "all literary methods are legitimate which succeed."

As a man of extremely wide reading—for all his reputed laziness, Desmond seems to have read a vast quantity of literature—he was marvelously adept at literary comparison, and was able to toss off comparisons that make one happily reconsider writers in their light. "Gibbon, it has been said," he wrote in a brief review of a slight volume about Herbert Spencer, "wrote about himself in the same tone as he wrote about the Roman Empire. Herbert Spencer wrote about himself in exactly the same tone as he wrote about the Universe." When Desmond writes that D. H. Lawrence was the novelist equivalent of Carlyle, or Aldous Huxley the Anatole France of his day, or that "there is a great deal of Byron in Hamlet, or, if you like, of Hamlet in Byron," one comes away with a new handle on all these writers, figures, characters. He was equally good at finding exactly the right quotations to bring out qualities in a writer one hadn't quite noticed before. What Desmond MacCarthy did when he was at the top of his game as a critic was to revivify, to give a new life, to every author he wrote about. One cannot ask much more from criticism.

Desmond's criticism has a winning commonsensicality that is rare in criticism practiced at a high level. As a drama critic, for example, he knew better than to step into the Big Muddy of Shakespeare criticism. He knew that "it is a region of controversy which it is hardly worth while only to visit; you must settle down in it to learn anything—and if you do, you are apt to go mad." Put off by the excessive in art, he wrote of Victor Hugo, Wagner, and Swinburne: "There is a too-muchness about them all." When Swinburne in a poem addresses a cat ("May not you rejoice as I, . . ."), Desmond writes: "Now the public though crass is not such an ass as to put to a cat such a question as that." What finally made Desmond's commonsensicality so winning is that it never descended, as a too strict application of common sense is apt to do in the arts, to philistinism.

Good as Desmond could be at criticism, it is far from clear whether he ever settled into the role of critic. "I am an acute and balanced critic," he wrote to Oliver Esher, who was trying to secure a knighthood for him, "who sometimes writes uncommonly well, but one who has been compelled by the exigencies of earning a living with his pen to express what he has to say about literature and drama as a reviewer and weekly critic of plays." He knew, I think, the value of criticism when done well, and could write: "The creative writer must know his own mind; the critic must also know the minds of other people. He must be able to harmonise personal sensibility with an exposition of case-made law; tradition is also evidence." When Des-

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mond writes about other critics, it is difficult not to read autobiography into his sentences. Apropos of the critic Walter Raleigh, a man of small but elegant output, he wrote: "He was a book-minded man who loved life better than books." And Desmond closes his essay on Raleigh, who was also a famous talker, with this statement: His talk "was a fountain of intellectual high spirits tossing and glittering, playful and surprising. Those refreshed by it found it hard to regret that in him the artist had died into the Improvisatore."

I once asked Sir William Haley, who knew Desmond when he, Haley, was director-general of the BBC and with whom he was a neighbor in the Thames-side village of Hampton, his view of Desmond MacCarthy. Sir William replied:

> Much has been made of the fact that he never wrote a major work. His seven volumes are all collections of short pieces. He was—to borrow one of W. H. Hudson's titles—"A Traveller in Little Things." So was his talk. He never embarked on a sustained major subject. No one expected he would. It was not in his nature. But his character studies, critiques, reviews, general essays were the essence of the way he lived and wrote. . . . He was easygoing. He rarely used his pen in anger. His "Portraits" are of human beings, not of intellectual conceptions. He communicated mostly pleasure and appreciation. So did his talk. I never knew him angry or heard him denounce anybody. Yet his "little things" contain some memorable riches.

Writing about Renan, Desmond accused him of painting in his heroes those traits which he most loved in himself, and he remarked upon this that it showed a sign of "incomplete self-awareness; and self-awareness is a quality which, in a critical as opposed to a creative mind, is of primary importance." Poor Desmond was never for long able to shake his awareness of the disparity between his aspirations and his achievements. Late in life he said that "renown is a cold hard empty thing compared with the warm admiration of friends in youth and those who have tasted the one are apt to show early a sage's indifference to reputation." One's guess is that he cared less about the world's disappointment in him than in his disappointment in himself.

In *Beginning Again*, Leonard Woolf recounts the last evening he spent with Desmond before his death. He, Desmond, was suffering from asthma, and Woolf had run to fetch a cab for him.

> When I put him into the taxi, he looked, not like an affable hawk [Affable Hawk was a pen name Desmond used for his column in *The New Statesman*] or even a disheveled fledgling, but like a battered, shattered, dying rook. . . . I left Desmond sitting in the taxi, affectionate, dejected, unheroic, because so obviously broken and beaten by asthma and by life; but brave in not complaining and not pretending and in still, when he could, making his joke and his phrase.

Does anything more surely presage a sad old age than great expectations when young? Or is the lesson here instead that only a fool thinks he can have literature and life, too? It might have pleased Desmond MacCarthy to know that, nearly forty years after his death, much of the criticism he wrote under the torture of such self-inflicted pressure not only holds up but yields delight and increases understanding—it might, but I doubt if it would have been enough.

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Catching up to the past: Popova at MOMA

by Deborah Rosenthal

The photograph of the artist Liubov Popova (1889-1924) in the catalogue of the recent Museum of Modern Art exhibition reveals a young woman with a girlish face.[1] She has round, shiny eyes, and her long neck is adorned with a string of dazzly pearls (or pseudo-pearls) that becomes a phosphorescent glow in this seventy-year-old photograph. In another photograph, taken by Rodchenko in the year she died, her little smile shows us tiny crooked teeth. Her hair, arranged in two curvy wings, flies up on either side of her face like pigtails. Popova seems so very young: something about her face, her expression, suggests qualities of a child—naïveté, innocence, or just plain *earliness.* She looks like an incarnation of the childhood of modern art. Popova, a major contributor to the painting legacy of the early-twentieth-century Russian Constructivist avant-garde, was little more than a name before this exhibition—the first of her work since 1921—and so, though her work is part of what made our own possible, we don't even know it. In these photographs, she seems a bit like a figure from an allegory of the modern spirit, a figure Paul Klee might have dreamed up. The show at the Museum of Modern Art gave us back—gave us for the first time—a significant painter's oeuvre. And the allegory turned out to be a tangled one about the youth of one's ancestors, about doubling back in time to catch up with a revolutionary and still paradigmatic past.

The Popova retrospective offered a thrill: a first view of paintings suppressed for seventy years, paintings which one had previously not known, but which will, now, stay in one's mind; a first view of a brilliant painter whose short career turns out, surprisingly, to have been a full one. If one went anticipating the collection of scraps, odd relics, and information that make up the *natures mortes* of some shows burdened with historical significance, one found instead the whole story told in the paintings themselves; and through them, a new woman painter on the map.

The accident of birth had put Liubov Sergeevna Popova into the world in interesting times in an interesting place. Although to be born in Russia in 1889 could mean that among one's grandparents was a man who had been born a serf, it also meant that that serf could have ascended, as Popova's grandfather did, into the educated classes. Most of Popova's family was well connected: Po-

1 "Liubov Popova" was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from February 14 through April 23, 1991. It will travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (June 19-August 18, 1991), the Museum Ludwig, Cologne (October 1- November 30, 1991), and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (December 18, 1991-February 16, 1992). A catalogue, with an essay by Magdalena Dabrowski, associate curator in MOMA's Department of Drawings and director of the exhibition, has been published by the Museum of Modern Art/Harry N. Abrams (135 pages, $39.95; $19.95 paper).

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pova's father was a well-to-do, cultivated man who gave his daughter a liberal education; many of her relatives became important in the cultural life of Soviet Russia—among them were an architect, an important collector, an artist, several prominent professors.

From the time she was a teenager, Popova's family was based in Moscow, but she traveled widely in Russia and saw a great deal of Russian art and architecture. Having briefly visited Italy in 1910 with her family, Popova went off to France a few years later with her former governess and a couple of friends. Then twenty-four, she had come to feel that she needed a closer-up view of the French vanguard painting she'd already glimpsed in the Shchukin collection (which was open to the public from 1909 on). Popova spent part of 1912-13 and part of 1914-15 in Paris. When one thinks of some of the artist-visitors who passed through the city in just those few years, it seems likely that being there for that "moment" in the birth process of Parisian modernism sufficed for a lifetime. For Popova, Paris meant a short spell studying alongside a few other Russian friends (notably Nadezhda Udaltsova) with Jean Metzinger and Henri Le Fauconnier, and a bit of exposure to the second-generation French Cubists. Once she had returned (via Italy) to Russia, she never left again. Her entire artistic career spanned only about ten years after her departure from Paris—she died suddenly of scarlet fever at the age of thirty-five. If the fact of her rapid departure signals anything more than circumstance—the war, her attachments in Russia—it is perhaps the strength of her conviction that an advanced art at home was not only possible but actual. Rather younger than some of the leading Russians (Malevich was eleven years her senior) and quite a bit younger than others (Kandinsky was twenty-three years older), Popova was born into the modernist movement. She lost no time finding her place: beginning almost immediately upon her return from Paris, Popova—an ardent and charismatic personality—spent the next decade showing, teaching, writing, and participating in artists' organizations alongside all the significant Russian avant-garde artists, from Tatlin to Rodchenko to Kandinsky to Malevich.

Popova was part of what might be called a third modernist generation, for the older Russian artists were already a second generation in relation to the major figures in Paris. It was vis-à-vis Parisian developments (some of which, such as Analytic and Synthetic Cubism, they saw telescoped into one) that both these generations made their innovations. Popova's first post-Paris work is called Cubo-Futurist—one of many hyphenated labels affixed to the movements, quasi-movements, "new forms," and even modes of thinking of this period. Often these labels stand for slightly uncomfortable transplants of French ways onto Russian soil—the hyphen signaling the distance between the French original and the Russian hybrid. With the exception of a group of works (deriving from experiments of Tatlin's) that Popova did that have been called "sculpto-paintings" (*sic!*), which indeed have a provincial air to them, Popova's oeuvre from Cubo-Futurism to her final works reveals no self-conscious distance between this young artist and her masters. Popova's Cubo-Futurism begins from Picasso and Braque's irregular fracturing of the object into delicately translucent scraps of tonal color, but she hardens those divisions into little compartments of opaque color. The resulting somewhat stringy divisions of the plane recall Metzinger. Popova's color, though perhaps closer to her idea of Synthetic Cubist color, is surprisingly personal; in her *Cubist Cityscape* of 1914, saturated warm reds and yellows are marked with heavy black and white accents. The landscapes are the best work of this period. Although there are some good, rather muscular cubified pencil drawings of the model, Popova didn't know how to hold a figure in a Cubist structure (that great question that Paris hadn't solved, either, at this point). Popova either misunderstood still life, or, more likely, was out of sympathy with what she did understand about it—its being essentially object-bound and inherently un-

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dramatic. Or perhaps she just got better as she went along. In any case, it's her 1916 Cubist landscapes that show her hitting her stride. There was the interesting, a-little-too-complicated *Box Factory*; there also was *Birsk*, a rhythmical, greenish-brownish, black-and-white evocation of a Russian city. Its large, clear, circular rhythms are compelling, and the angular facets of its buildings are as clearly limned as if they were seen through a crystal.

Popova came fairly quickly to painting non-objective pictures. There were only a few apprentice paintings in the Suprematist mode in the show; some of the earliest of the abstractions she did from 1916 through 1921 or 1922 retain still-life elements, and these seem unresolved. But others of the same period are purely abstract: they are a synthesis of Léger's opaque flat planes and the solidly colored planes that flew through Malevich's Suprematist compositions. Popova was part of the group around Malevich, and in 1916-17, at the time she was designing a logo (for a proposed Suprematist journal) using a vertiginously poised four-sided plane, that same figure appeared in pink, in white, in black, laid over three or four other such shapes on a white ground, in several of her paintings. Though she owed the white ground to Malevich, Popova transforms its meaning in some of her own works. Her piled-up planes, though angled Malevich-style so as to seem poised in deep or infinite space, suggest large, apposite physical presences rather than forces or sensations as Malevich's do. The effect in the Popovas is indeed what she called it in the title she affixes to all the paintings in this first abstract series, *Painterly Architectonic*—it is built from a stable ground, rather than aerodynamically perceived. Oddly, even the logo for the Suprematist journal shows that tilted plane of Malevich's now touching two edges of the framing square, as the planes do in so many of Popova's paintings. (Wondering what Malevich thought of this, I think of Mondrian's dismissal of Van Doesburg's reintroduction of the diagonal, and hope that Malevich didn't feel a parallel disgust for what seems to me a more intelligent revisionism within his ranks.)

Popova moved from solidly colored, opaquely painted parallel shapes laid over one another, to intersecting, interpenetrating planes with openings into the white-ground plane. From there she went on to the linear scaffolds or "rays" of the final set of pictures, titled generally *Space-Force Constructions.* Her development was neither systematic nor programmatic: what the successive rooms at the MOMA show gave us was a classic picture of the geometric abstractionist who tries out now one set of variables and then another. Among these several rooms of smallish paintings (most three feet high and under), there were beautiful pictures in each room—from the *Painterly Architectonic* of 1916 on the cover of the catalogue, to the more triangulated forms of a *Painterly Architectonic* of 1918. In the first Popova uses heavy opaque planes of red, black, dark blue, green, and white; in the second a palette of metallic, somewhat dematerialized green, blue, white, and alizarin crimson that reminded me of the tones in which Kandinsky and Chagall created their phantasms.

It was good to see that in the final room of paintings hung her best single work. Titled *Constructivist Composition* although it belongs to the *Space-Force* series, this picture was painted in 1921, when Popova was thirty-one. This is one of several pictures Popova painted on a surface of reddish unprimed plywood. On this warm ground she drew lines of red, blue, and black that intersect on the diagonal. In the angles created by these intersections are rough-edged triangles of pink, white, and blue. The austere cuisine of this painting—its fuzzy clumps of color areas tamped onto the kinkily luxuriant prole material of plywood—moves in and out of one's consciousness of the delicate compositional interlace of plane, plane, and line/force. The saturated vermilion that in the earlier *Painterly Architectonic* pictures had been blazoned on broad planes here gets diffused in the surface warmth and immanence of the plywood, or else narrowed down into a thin band of color. Red and pink, that faintly East-

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ern combination that surprised in her earlier Suprematist compositions, here gets combined with blue, and all together lend to this picture's sober cosmic notions of voids and rays a rococo gaiety.

One came, here, to the (official) end of Popova's easel-painting oeuvre, and the beginning, in the MOMA show, of the much less interesting applied-art designs. Her easel painting did not end organically, as it were. At the end of 1921, along with twenty-five other painters, Popova signed a statement promulgated by Osip Brik, one of the theoreticians of the day, renouncing easel painting in favor of so-called production art—i.e., applied arts, the design of useful objects. From the beginning of 1922 till her death in 1924, Popova's public life as an artist was filled with designing fabrics, theater decor and costumes, posters, books, and porcelain. Apparently, though, she continued, at least into 1922, to work on the easel painting she'd sworn off. If it's easy to see why Popova, intent on repeating her compositional problems and now solving them so elegantly, couldn't just drop them, it would be a mistake to imagine that she was dragged away from the easel into the design studio. She participated in this artistic self-suppression as a sort of conscious leap of faith; an extension of the break nonobjectivity had made with the past. In 1920 Popova had written, "We are breaking with the past because we do not believe it anymore, because its hypotheses are unacceptable." To help bring about a more perfect world, a world in greater harmony with the new and hopeful hypotheses of art, could only have seemed a good to Popova and her fellows; the extension of their principled and disciplined life into the greater world must have made sense. And in the Russian context, where the icon was one of the sources that nurtured formal invention, the notion that the expressive world both precedes and reflects the actual one would not be strange. And so, acting to purge the bourgeois origins of easel painting, the Russian artists began the spiral of dicta that ended in the suppression of their own avant-garde art and the mandate of Socialist Realism.

Fortunately for her, Popova did not live to see that turning point, the hints of which sent Kandinsky, among others, away from Russia forever, as early as 1921. Going through the Malevich show that was at the Metropolitan while the Popova show was at MOMA, one felt the enormity of what had happened to all three artists—both at the time and in the time between then and now. Imagining the debate, and encountering the actuality of Russian avant-garde art in the mid- to late Twenties is rather like having a fantastically rich and interesting dream, and being awakened before its denouement. The lingering sadness is almost unbearable. The revolutions of Russian art had barely happened, evolution was only just starting to set in. Popova herself raised the question of whether the nonobjective work of art risks becoming itself an object; the question was not to be seriously debated again for decades. The arguments were just then being formulated that could overtake the experiments that had transformed painting and sculpture; and then, the whole thing was permanently interrupted. Popova's life ended with her still thinking over the issues; her funeral was public and a posthumous exhibition was held eight months after her death. Malevich's fate was evinced at the Met by roomfuls of representational paintings from the late Twenties and early Thirties—coarse betrayals, for the most part, of the delicacy and intellect of the Suprematist paintings. The greatest horror is that Malevich knew what was happening to him: on a visit to Germany in 1927, Malevich brought with him a retrospective including Suprematist works that he carefully left behind him on his return to Russia. Those works became the core of the Malevich oeuvre that we knew in the West until the Met retrospective, which presented his work in the U.S. for the first time.

The re-exposure of Popova's suppressed oeuvre to the light of day was the great accomplishment of the MOMA show. The catalogue is a useful stage-by-stage outline of Popova's formal development, and gives a

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chronology as well. The essential facts seem to be there, and the essential illustrations; we need this. But the section of chemical analyses of Popova's paint surfaces, illustrated with X-ray photographs of her pictures, is a cruel joke on Popova's interest in facture. When we have barely made the acquaintance of the paintings, do we really need to see their X-rays?

Strangely enough, the Popova oeuvre the Soviets suppressed has also been made the subject of study by two Russian art historians, Natalia L. Adaskina and Dimitri V. Sarabianov. The English-language edition of their book *Popova* [2] bears neither date of Russian publication nor an account of when the authors' research was carried out; the book was published first in Paris, in French translation, in 1989. This study is so good, such an impassioned and intelligent discussion of Popova's life and art, that the ironies (it was almost surely completed while the paintings were still in Soviet limbo; the authors themselves make no mention of their own situation in that limbo) are all the more haunting. The figure of Popova that the Russians paint is—it is almost ridiculous to say it—very Russian; that is to say, vivid, strong, and at the same time tinged with a heart-dropping melancholy and sense of loss. That young, hopeful, girl-woman who looks out of the MOMA catalogue had been married less than a year before her new husband, an art historian, died of typhus, leaving the artist with an infant son. Several years later, Popova lived through the death of that son only days before her own death. Through it all, Popova was phenomenally productive in her own work and in the work of the public institutions to which she became increasingly committed.

It was not only the sense of having nothing to lose, though, that made Popova the completely fearless person she was in her twenties and thirties. I think she must have been born that way; but also, she was nurtured by the Russian liberal tradition as well as the artistic and social radicalism in which she made her home as an adult. Popova's writing, which proceeded logically from her years of teaching (the film director Eisenstein was among her students), extended from theoretical considerations of style to tracts on Constructivism. Joined to the natural authority of her intellect in these writings is the hopefulness that an intelligent woman must feel as conventions of the past are brought within her scope, and perhaps for the moment suspended. Popova acted without inhibitions. She seized opportunities; a magnetic person, she attracted the most interesting artists in her milieu and forged relationships that supported her steady focus on her art and the questions of the day. Nonobjective art was a defining moment of our century, a great revolution in the wake of whose forward momentum all artists have worked ever since. Liubov Popova, who by force of her talents became fully part of that revolution, created something that we are still running to catch up with.

2 *Popova*, by Dimitri V. Sarabianov and Natalia L. Adaskina, translated from the Russian by Marian Schwartz; Abrams, 396 pages, $85.

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Alexandre Dumas: fact and fiction

by Renee Winegarten

If reading is a vice that goes unpunished, as the poet has it, then Alexandre Dumas *père* (1802-1870) offers one of the principal means of access to that form of depravity for devotees too numerous to mention. Throughout the world, how many have tasted for the first time the refined pleasures, the ecstasies and thrills of reading, in *The Three Musketeers* and its sequels, or *The Count of Monte-Cristo*? How many have ventured to own that it was Dumas senior who set their feet on the primrose path, not just of dalliance, but of extremely serious liaisons with other novelists in the loftiest realms of literature? André Malraux, visiting Cayenne in his role as minister of culture, remembered a novel he had read as a small boy, Dumas's *Georges*, the adventures of a half-French mulatto with a will of steel who led a revolt against the British in the Caribbean. Malraux remarked elsewhere that he had passed when young from *The Three Musketeers* to Balzac, implying a kind of progress to higher things.

There, the word "judgment" is out. Malraux was far from alone in suggesting that Dumas was not a figure of the first order. It has long been customary to look askance at that prodigiously prolific writer: his early historical importance as a dramatist is readily admitted in manuals of literature, but his novels do not usually form part of the syllabus like those of Mérimée, Stendhal, or Balzac. All the same, Mérimée (who—like Dumas—also wrote historical fiction) said that he admired Dumas more than Sir Walter Scott, the doyen of historical novelists. Certainly, Dumas is greater fun: he does not linger over description or preachment, and he is very rarely tedious.

Can Dumas be mentioned in the same breath with Balzac (who started out by writing lurid adventure stories but moved on afterwards)? Certainly, Dumas did not think of himself as an "artist," sacrificing life to perfection in art in the manner of Flaubert. On the contrary, his contemporaries saw him as an elemental force, and he was intent on living life to the full. Claude Schopp, the noted authority on Dumas, rightly subtitles his biography of a man who was large in every sense, "the genius of life." [1] As for Dumas —surprising as it must seem nowadays—he considered himself to be a disciple of "the realist school" of Aeschylus and Shakespeare. He called himself a humanist and a popularizing novelist. "I am movement and life," he declared. Verve and vigor were certainly among his supreme qualities.

There may be a change in Dumas's posthumous fate, possibly because greater consideration is now being given to popular aspects of writing or culture in general, if not always with sensible results. Moreover, pressure is being exerted to eliminate so-called elitism or discrimination when discussing all

1 *Alexandre Dumas: Genius of Life*, by Claude Schopp, translated from the French by A. J. Koch; Franklin Watts, 506 pages, $27.50.

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forms of creativity. Perhaps certain elements in Dumas's work carry a charge that is in accord with current modes and moods, and especially with a taste for melodrama. (Has that taste ever been totally eliminated? Even great works, especially in the realm of opera, contain more than a modicum of melodrama.) It would appear that Dumas is actually enjoying a revival of sorts. In any case, he has always occupied a secret alcove in the hearts of lovers of pure narrative and narrative skills, and admirers of generosity of spirit.

Not so long ago, Dumas's play *Antony* (1831), which was a huge success in its own day, would have seemed unactable on the modern stage. Yet it was presented (in translation) in the spring of 1990 at the famous Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, and was found to be worthwhile and highly enjoyable. It was, however, surely a serious mistake to move the setting from the 1830s to the 1880s. The current mania of stage directors for moving dramas and operas out of their historical context is often a token of laziness, conceit, or condescension toward the public. *Antony* encapsulates the spirit of the early 1830s. The reason why the play made so deep an impression in 1831 was because it depicted the passionate relationship between a man and a woman "realistically," that is, in contemporary speech, dress, and manners, without classical decorum or historical remoteness. The play's success also owed a great deal, as Dumas himself generously owned, to the talents of Marie Dorval and Pierre Bocage, who displayed a "natural" or unrhetorical style of acting that took Paris by storm and made their reputation as Romantic actors *par excellence.*

Antony, the doomed young Byronic hero or anti-hero, is illegitimate, and can discover nothing about his parentage. Thus, although he is superior in every way to the gilded youth of the age, he can have no place in good society. He rebels and rails against its conventions and prejudices. The damage done to his personality is manifest. What might be called the existential anguish caused by his non-status is exacerbated by his despair at the social impossibility of his union with Adèle, the woman he loves, who has been obliged to suppress her passion for him in a loveless marriage to the respectable Colonel d'Hervey.

The lovers meet again after the passage of years: Adèle now has a child; she reluctantly repulses Antony, and takes flight. At an inn on her route, whither he has pursued her, he takes her by force in a jealous frenzy. Their secret liaison becomes known in society, where only casual affairs (as distinct from grand passions) are commonplace. When the absent husband is at the door, Antony stabs Adèle as she herself wishes, in order to preserve her reputation. "She resisted me, I killed her!" cries Antony, throwing his dagger at the Colonel's feet. Curtain. Antony knows that he will be executed for her murder. The new theme of 1831 was middle-class adultery, regarded as an extremely serious matter, because it affected money and inheritance. Dumas was quite as much interested in money, or rather wealth, as Balzac, whom he regarded as his rival.

On the face of it, there would seem to be little in *Antony* to occupy a modern audience. The play was, as Dumas said, "a love scene in five acts." Nonetheless, Antony's revolt against social prejudice and society in general, his race to sexual gratification, the conflict in Adèle between being true to her passion and obedience to ideas of family, convention, and convenience—these have not altogether lost their force, as the welcome accorded to the Glasgow production made plain. Nor has Dumas's dramatic urgency, as he hurtles his prose drama along, despite the ill-timed tirade on the aim of modern theater being to reveal the human heart in all its nakedness.

When Dumas wrote the play he was in the throes of his passion for the writer Mélanie Waldor (married to a military man by whom she had a daughter). He gave his own retrospective sexual jealousy to Antony. All this, together with Dumas's curious ancestry (about which more will have to be said), made him declare that he was Antony minus

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the murder, as Mélanie was Adèle minus the flight. In a poem which he said was written two years before the play, and which he appended to it as a preface, Dumas cried, "Woe, woe to me, cast by heaven into this world a stranger to its laws!" Adèle, too, alludes to Antony as one who seemed a "stranger" or outsider in the world. This was over a hundred years before Camus's novel *L'Etranger*. The wild tones that can be heard in the poem and the play are to be found in Dumas's frenzied letters to Mélanie Waldor. What now often seems to be role-playing or excess was actually the way people liked to address each other in that era.

At one remove, another play of Dumas's has been holding the boards recently in Paris and London. This is *Kean, ou désordre et génie* (1836), in the version made in 1953 by Jean-Paul Sartre at the request of the late Pierre Brasseur. A bravura performer, Brasseur had become internationally famous for his portrayal of the great Romantic actor Frédéric Lemaître in everybody's favorite French film, *Les Enfants du paradis*. Originally, Lemaître himself had taken a version of *Kean* by two hack writers to show to Dumas, who put life into it and transformed it into a striking vehicle for the noted thespian. As for Sartre, he was partial to melodrama and sought to revive it. He said he greatly loved Dumas, judging him to be an excellent novelist and the author of some very good plays.

Sartre kept to Dumas's outline and retained many of his predecessor's potent lines, while bringing to the subject his own existentialist preoccupations. In Dumas, Kean is the dissipated English actor of genius (who had died only a few years before), the social outcast in revolt against society, and the abuser of privilege in the Romantic manner. In Sartre's version the great actor turns into the existential "bastard," or, as Sartre expressed it, "this man who becomes an actor to elude his resentment against society, and who carries with him a kind of revolutionary force." In Paris in 1987 the role was taken with great acclaim by the film star Jean-Paul Belmondo, like Brasseur a bravura performer, in a lavish production. In London in 1990, in translation, it was again a huge popular success as played by Derek Jacobi, a sensitive and versatile actor though not by nature a bravura one. Sartre's existentialist game with the actor's lack of a sense of identity, when united with Dumas's exhilarating melodramatic plot, can prove a mixture difficult to resist in the theater.

Dumas had actually seen Kean himself, the great Shakespearian, perform in Paris; he also admired Kemble and Macready. Ever since, as a youth of seventeen, Dumas had attended a provincial performance of *Hamlet* in the pallid adaptation by Jean-François Ducis, he worshiped Shakespeare and was mad about the theater. He made his name as a dramatist with historical plays, including *Henri III et sa cour* (1829), with its reminiscences of Shakespeare, Schiller, and Sir Walter Scott, a play that heralded the triumph of the French Romantic movement before its acknowledged dramatic advent with Victor Hugo's *Hernani*.

It was only afterwards that Dumas turned to writing novels, usually with the aid of a succession of collaborators, who included the helpful Auguste Macquet (or Augustus Mac Keat, as he liked to be known) and even the poet Gérard de Nerval. The wits used to refer to the enterprise as if it were a commercial firm, the House of Dumas and Company. Both *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte-Cristo*, for instance, were the work of Dumas and Macquet, though it would be difficult to see in them the presence of different hands—always supposing that the breathless reader could manage to stop to look for them. The two writers were often to be found working twelve hours a day, with at least two novels on the stocks at the same time. Indeed, when Dumas stood as a candidate in the elections of 1848, he put himself forward as "a worker," listing the sizable number of his works in justification of the title. According to him, these amounted to four hundred volumes and thirty-five dramas in twenty years. However, the electors decided not to revise their own more common

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notion of what constituted a proletarian and did not adopt him.

Not content with his huge output in fiction, Dumas often turned his novels into plays. It was common practice: George Sand took the same course (although, as Dumas thought, to less effect). Dumas employed collaborators and regurgitated his works in different genres because he needed money —for his mother, his wife, his children, his friends, all and sundry, including the extremely long line of his mistresses—though "line" inaccurately suggests succession rather than simultaneity. These last included numerous actresses, the opera singer Caroline Ungher (famous as Bellini's Norma and Donizetti's Parisina) and, in his declining years, the American Jewish equestrian performer Adah Isaacs Menken. Temperamentally, Dumas enjoyed the siege, but he was inclined to grow bored shortly after the surrender.

He lived extravagantly when he had money, ruining himself in building a château or mansion in various styles, including Gothic, Renaissance, and Moorish, with an English garden. He called it Monte-Cristo. It had a harem for his mistresses, and a menagerie of over two hundred animals. No fewer than six hundred friends were invited to the housewarming in July 1848, and there was always open house for numerous parasites. Dumas was wildly generous, and often in debt. "I have never refused money to anyone except to my creditors," he said once. It was the lordly attitude he gave to his Kean. The Count of Monte-Cristo himself, with his fabulous inexhaustible wealth and the immense power it gives him, is the wish-fulfillment of a writer who dreamed of riches. Dumas made money enough but it slipped through his fingers.

The list of Dumas's works is daunting. It seems unlikely that anyone could have read them all. Here are no slim volumes in the refined manner of a Jane Austen, but novels each consisting of eight or ten tomes. Dumas belongs with those who produced in such quantity that quality and reputation inevitably suffer. Yet Baudelaire (critic as well as poet), while regarding Dumas's facility or "fearful dysentery" with disfavor, could not refrain from lauding the novelist's prodigious imagination: "this man . . . seems to represent universal vitality," he wrote. The sheer energy involved is breathtaking. Dumas lived in an age when writers were "geniuses," larger than life, incredibly productive and energetic (Victor Hugo, Balzac, George Sand).

Besides being a playwright and novelist, Dumas was one of the founders of modern journalism, at a time when the cheap popular press was being launched in France. He wrote about anything and everything: drama criticism (often padded out with lengthy quotations), reminiscences (occasionally improved by invention), lively accounts of his travels (he would be an indefatigable traveler—to Italy, Germany, England, Spain, Russia, North Africa, and elsewhere). Dumas even wrote on gastronomy and fashion. He founded papers of his own like the charmingly named *Le Mousquetaire*, *Le d'Artagnan*, *Le Monte-Cristo*, none of which enjoyed a long life. Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Dumas also claimed to have invented the *roman-feuilleton*, the novel published in the popular press in installments. If he did not invent it, he was certainly one of its most admired and sought-after practitioners. His fiction has survived much more readily than that of Eugène Sue, the once popular author of *The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*.

His ambitions were vast—quite as vast as those of Balzac, who aimed to capture an entire society in all its aspects in a series of novels. "My first wish has no limit," said Dumas. "My first aspiration is always for the impossible." (He once contemplated writing a novel that began with Jesus and ended with the last man!) In effect, what he sought to do was to re-create the whole of French history and make it live in drama and fiction. Many around the world have acquired their first notions of French history from Dumas, just as they have gained their idea of American history from the cinema.

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In the early nineteenth century, historical inquiry was seen as resolutely modern. Dumas might treat documents or memoirs in a cavalier fashion, but they provided the starting point for imaginative re-creation and inventiveness. From the fourteenth century he took the subject of what is perhaps his most famous play, *La Tour de Nesle* (1832), about the secret scandalous goings-on of Queen Marguerite de Bourgogne. Concealed under a mask, she makes a habit of having each young lover murdered after a single night of pleasure and the body thrown in the Seine. It is a satisfyingly lurid melodrama of hidden and mistaken identities, passion, power, intrigue, and incest. The French cinema in its heyday could hardly miss an opportunity to film such a subject.

Dumas contributed to the revival of interest in the late sixteenth century with his novels about the last Valois kings and the Wars of Religion. He also stimulated curiosity about the early seventeenth century —an era with a romantic tinge of its own. Men and women were thought to live in those days a more energetic and exciting kind of life than was experienced in a bourgeois industrial era like his. It is difficult now to see the age of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu, or the revolt of the nobles known as the Fronde, without something of Dumas coloring one's view.

For many, the period is forever associated with the three (or four) musketeers who fight in unquenchable friendship, all for one and one for all, in the struggle to outwit the dangerously clever Milady. *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844), based partly on the apocryphal memoirs of d'Artagnan, the impoverished Gascon who became Captain of the King's Guard, was surely in Edmond Rostand's mind when he charted the exploits of Cyrano, the (honorary) Gascon scholar-poet-dramatist, and the Gascon cadets, in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897). The fact that both d'Artagnan and Cyrano once lived and breathed cannot altogether remove the impression that they are more vivid on the page or the stage than they are in history.

Then there was an epoch-making event much closer to Dumas's own period: the Revolution of 1789. He must have heard a good deal about it from those who lived through the upheaval. His own father had risen rapidly from the ranks to become a general in the revolutionary armies. The Revolution dominated Dumas's imagination as a writer, just as it did the minds of many of his contemporaries, all seeking to grasp the causes and the significance of such a blood-stained phenomenon, to explain and sometimes even to justify its grislier manifestations. In 1845-46 Dumas published a strange novel, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, based on the memoirs of the so-called Marquis de Rougeville, who had joined a secret society that made several vain attempts to rescue the imprisoned Queen Marie-Antoinette.

Some of the seemingly most far-fetched episodes in this novel had their models in actuality. For instance, the woman protagonist who offers to change clothes with the Queen, in order to facilitate her escape, recalls the generosity of an English lady who asked to take the Queen's place. A similar offer was made to the imprisoned Mme Roland who, like the Queen she hated, declined to accept the sacrifice. In the novel, the Chevalier de Maison-Rouge stabs himself under the guillotine at the moment when the Queen is executed, in a scene typical of frenetic Romantic excess and horror—and yet a man was actually found still alive under the scaffold when the Queen was guillotined. Like many of his contemporaries, Dumas was haunted by the guillotine and its victims. After this book he wrote a cycle of novels on the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary period: *Joseph Balsamo*, *Le Collier de la Reine*, *Ange Pitou*, *La Comtesse de Charny*, in an attempt to chart the decline and fall of the French monarchy. This cycle has recently been reprinted, doubtless to coincide with the bicentenary of the Revolution. Later in life, Dumas would return to the theme of the Revolution and its consequences.

Although the novelist had no great sympathy for the Bourbon dynasty, he did feel deeply for prisoners whatever their al-

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legiance—not only the unfortunate Queen Marie-Antoinette, but also the earlier "Man in the Iron Mask" (supposedly the twin brother of Louis XIV) who spent a lifetime in prison. Most famously, perhaps, there is his own hero, the long-suffering Edmond Dantès, confined for years in the dungeons of the château d'If at Marseilles. Dantès's cruel fate and his later role as relentless avenger were drawn from an actual case of betrayal and wrongful imprisonment found in the police archives. Like the Count of Monte-Cristo, the original victim was a master of impenetrable disguise. He did not share with his fictional counterpart, though, the rare gift to be at home in many different countries and languages.

This fellow feeling with prisoners probably derived from the fact that the novelist's father, General Dumas, had been imprisoned in Naples under the Bourbons who ruled the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It happened when he was returning from Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign, and he never fully recovered from the sickness he contracted in the Neapolitan prison. Indeed, he died in 1806 when Dumas was not yet four years old. In Egypt, General Dumas had made the grave mistake of expressing a different view from that of General Bonaparte, who saw to it that he was sent into retirement and deprived of the pension due to him.

While Dumas spoke of Napoleon as his father's "murderer," he could not help admiring the military genius who promoted French *gloire*. When, after Napoleon's downfall in 1815, the Bonapartists (in opposition under the Bourbon Restoration) adopted the Emperor's belated conversion to "liberalism," Dumas could be found among their number. Later, he would become a friend of Prince Napoleon (son of the Emperor's brother, Jérôme, former King of Westphalia), and would visit the island of Monte-Cristo with him. There is no way of following the political intricacies and intrigues that led to Edmond Dantès's long and terrible incarceration without some acquaintance with the effect of the rapidly changing regimes of the years 1814-15, or with the cynical and unscrupulous characters who (like Edmond's enemies) knew how to profit by those changes to rise to positions of power and wealth. Unjust imprisonment is not a theme that has become outdated.

Dumas's ancestry was more likely to make him another Antony or outsider than a figure of established society. He and Alexander Pushkin were (as far as I know) the only heirs of Byron to have Africans among their forebears. The mighty Russian creator of *Eugene Onegin* was at once proud of his African great-grandfather and unhappy at what he called his own "negroid ugliness." Dumas was sometimes teased in a thoughtless manner about his touch of the tarbrush (as it used to be called); sometimes he met with real animosity. One of Dumas's enemies, no doubt jealous of his popular success, wrote that his collaborators worked like "Negro laborers under the whip of a mulatto." There was a play on words here, for the word "nègres" is used in French to mean not only blacks but literary assistants. When the electors of 1848 made it clear that they did not want a "Negro," Dumas thought of standing as a candidate for election in the Antilles. The writer's long-dead grandmother, Cessette Dumas, had been a black slave of Saint-Domingue (Haiti), at that time in part a French colony. She bore several illegitimate children to Colonel Antoine-Alexandre Davy de La Pailleterie, a Norman reprobate of noble but modest rank with the courtesy title of Marquis, who had gone to the colony to seek his fortune.

Three of the children were sold into slavery to help finance the father's return to France with his son, Thomas-Alexandre, whom he acknowledged. With the Revolution and careers open to talent, Thomas-Alexandre enlisted under his mother's name of Dumas in the army of the Republic, distinguished himself by performing singular feats of strength and heroic valor, and was rapidly promoted. He was able to marry the daughter of the former majordomo to the Ducs d'Orléans, first princes of the blood royal, who possessed a château at Villers-

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Cotterets, the town where the future writer was born. It was under the protection of the Duc d'Orléans (later King Louis-Philippe) and in his offices in the handsome Palais-Royal that the young Dumas would begin his career in Paris as a copy clerk.

Notwithstanding his friendship with the ill-fated Duc de Chartres (elder son of the Duc d'Orléans), who was to die in a tragic accident, Dumas did not prove particularly loyal to the Orléans house, the younger branch of the Bourbon dynasty. When the Revolution of July 1830 broke out, sealing the fate of the elder branch, Dumas dashed off to Soissons, a town close to his birthplace, to obtain powder for the insurgents. He was not at all pleased when Louis-Philippe ascended the throne. As he wrote in his memoirs (which, despite numerous volumes, only reach to February 1833), the young men of the people who made the Revolution of 1830, that "ardent youth of the heroic proletariat," as he called them, are soon cast aside, and "the parasites of power" rise at their expense to position and command. There was never any doubt where his sympathies lay.

During the Revolution of 1848, Dumas was to be found in the streets, marching with the students and workers. Although in the beginning he supported Louis Napoleon (the first Emperor's putative nephew), Dumas was opposed to his presidency. The coup d'état of December 2, 1851, which set the scene for the Second Empire a year later, led to his departure for Brussels. However, he was not there as a political exile like Victor Hugo and so many others (with whom he sympathized), but rather because he was bankrupt. The construction and furnishing of his mansion, together with his lavish entertaining there, had largely contributed to his financial plight. He would be prosecuted in 1855 for public expressions of sympathy with the political exiles, and he visited Victor Hugo on his "rock" in Guernsey (in 1857)—a gesture of friendship much appreciated by the poet in exile.

By 1860, after obtaining a large advance for the publication of his complete works, Dumas was again in funds. He acquired a schooner and set sail for Sicily to join Garibaldi and the Thousand, who by then had taken Palermo. (The writer had encountered the popular liberator before, in Turin.) Dumas offered to obtain arms for Garibaldi who, having captured Naples, made him a freeman of the city where his father had once been incarcerated. In addition, the grateful Garibaldi appointed Dumas director of the Naples museums. The tireless novelist founded a paper, *L'Independente*; he also published a French version of Garibaldi's memoirs, and an account of the expedition of the Thousand. G. M. Trevelyan, the distinguished historian of the Sicilian campaign, observed that this account was "not inaccurate on the whole." Trevelyan also thought that the value of Dumas's edition of Garibaldi's memoirs as a historical document was "underrated."

As a result of his exploits and services for Garibaldi, Dumas was invited to join an insurrection in Albania, and was offered the rank of general, but he declined. He was by then over sixty. Those malicious observers, the brothers Goncourt, meeting him some years later, remarked on his marvelous talent as a raconteur. They said that he had an "enormous ego, as large as himself" but, they added, he was "overflowing with kindliness and sparkling with wit."

It is no wonder that Dumas is a name to conjure with among Italian writers. In Umberto Eco's recent novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, for instance, the three friends, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, have something of the three musketeers about them, with (it has been suggested) the computer named Abulafia making a fourth. In his inexhaustible, learned, and often hilarious variations on the vast theme of secret societies, Eco does not fail to mention Dumas's novel *Le Collier de la Reine*, echoing its author's view that the famous scandal over Queen Marie-Antoinette's necklace was prompted by a masonic plot to discredit the monarchy.

At the head of Eco's Chapter 97 is an epigraph from Dumas's novel *Joseph Balsamo*. Balsamo was a doctor and charlatan known

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as the Count of Cagliostro, born in Palermo in 1743, devotee of occultism and freemasonry, and exiled for his part in the scandal over the Queen's necklace. Readers will find in that chapter a discussion about the relative merits of the popular serial novel or *roman-feuilleton* and high art. This debate echoes current critical preoccupations. Where the *roman-feuilleton* "seems to speak in jest, basically it makes us see the world as it is, or at least as it will be. Women are much more like Milady than Clélia Conti," suggests Belbo. (The French translation names the idealized passionate Italian heroine of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, whereas the English version offers Dickens's sentimental Little Nell, who belongs to a different tradition entirely.)

How seriously are we meant to take Belbo's defense of the *roman-feuilleton* of Eugène Sue and Alexandre Dumas? What credence should be given to his suggestion (after Dumas himself) that the novel of adventure and romance is fundamentally "realistic," or potentially so, if that is what he means? Are we supposed to agree to his proposition that the vengeful, resourceful, sexually independent Milady, who nearly outwits d'Artagnan (ever ready to fall "in love" at the sight of an attractive woman), is a more normal or recognizable representative of womanhood than a heroine like Clélia? Is Umberto Eco playing with current feminist criteria here?

There follows Belbo's satirical pastiche of Eugène Sue (with his belief in the malign powers of the Jesuits) and of Dumas and the historical adventure novel, with allusions to Joseph Balsamo/Cagliostro and to Jeanne de La Motte, who was branded for her part in the scandal of the royal necklace. All this is doubtless written tongue-in-cheek, or half in jest, as part of an intellectual game, designed—like the rest of the book—to stimulate the reader's wits, blur the frontiers of fact and fiction in the current style, and confound us all with the author's cleverness. Nonetheless, it may indicate a line that could lead to a certain revaluation of Dumas's writings, should anyone venture to pursue it, or believe it worthwhile to do so.

For the fact remains: Dumas was loved, and is still loved in a way that contemporaries of his like Vigny or Mérimée or Sue are not. He wanted to give pleasure and he succeeded. Imaginative and narrative skills like his are not to be despised. Besides, we are not obliged to stay on the heights all the time.

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Three poems
by Mary Jo Salter

Icelandic almanac

I. The sky in Akureyri

in July is high and broad,
with here and there a dome of cloud
cocked like a hat that doesn't fit.

Nothing can put a cap on it,
this light that lasts all night,
even when the long, elliptic sun,

a low plane circling for an open
runway, nearly lands—
but throwing up its hands, ascends

by slow degrees again.
After a while, though every motion
tends to the horizontal, what

you're hoping for isn't sundown but
rainfall: something to precipitate
the end of a relentless,

restless Paradise.
Time an eternity of space . . .
Time watching as dark, overblown

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clouds hold their breath all day, then
drily fly away; time beaten thin
enough it may have passed

entirely into mist.
When at last the first
cloud dissolves (a tablet

in its own water), it's like a thought,
whose moving parts are discrete, caught
in the murky downpour of feeling.

But this is not the end. Trailing
behind with its blanket, failing
to see what can't be done, the sun

resumes that setting—or sitting—on
a fine, pink line it's drawn
to divide today from tomorrow.

II. The dark in Reykjavik

in December is far
from monolithic—not
a block of static blackness, but
an inky, effervescent

potion ever
carbonated by the dots
of thousands of electric lights.
The stars are burning

ceaselessly somewhere, and here
you remember that: orderly
stacks of them, floor by floor.
And neon at eleven in

the morning makes
everything you've done so far
(breakfast, getting dressed) appear
precocious, blazoned triumph—

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trumpeted, as well, by twin
high beams turning corners for
the dark at the end of their tunnels; or
by inverted funnels thrown

from a line of streetlamps.
Not monolithic, no, and yet
come noon, when, like the spangled velvet
drape the poet speaks of, night

parts (a space enough
to poke your face through; a spotlit
hour or two a playwright might
illuminate the limits of

our life in), gratitude
rises up. Even for that wall-to-wall
cloud rolled across the sky, as dull
and sullen as a pearl,

whose muffled glow
forecasts another kind. Not sun-
shine's diamond, and meant more to be seen
than see by; obscurity

dressed in white;
sub-zero understudy flown in from
everywhere at once—in sum:
snow filling in for light.

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Lullaby for a daughter

Someday, when the sands of time
invert, may you find perfect rest
as a newborn nurses from
the hourglass of your breast.

Lament

Waking in her crib, the boat
they pushed her off in long ago,
although she stood to shake the rail
and wail at them,
                she's all at sea.
Nothing familiar in the dark
until she rubs it from her eyes:
gray bear, gray ceiling where the moons
and stars turn, turn away.
                Why
wouldn't she cry? For out there, perched
at table's edge, unreachable,
white to the brim, supremely real,
the bottle with the golden nipple
glows like a lighthouse.

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Music

Mengelberg at the Philharmonic

by Samuel Lipman

The flood of fascinating CD reissues of marvelous old 78 RPM discs continues without interruption. The enterprising Pearl label in England has just released some, though unfortunately not all, of the electrical recordings made by the great Dutch conductor Willem Mengelberg with the New York Philharmonic (then called the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York) between 1925 and 1930.[1]

There is little doubt that Mengelberg was one of the great conductors of the century. Born in 1871 in Utrecht to German parents, he studied in Germany at the Cologne Conservatory, and in 1891 became conductor of the municipal orchestra in Lucerne. In 1895, he became conductor of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, a post he held until 1945. Mengelberg was also the leading conductor of the New York Philharmonic from 1923 to 1929, when he was replaced by Toscanini, though he continued to conduct the orchestra into the 1929-30 season. Throughout Mengelberg's career, he was a champion of the works of Gustav Mahler; in 1920, he celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary at the Concertgebouw with a complete Mahler cycle. He was also devoted to the works of Richard Strauss. *Ein Heldenleben* was dedicated to Mengelberg; he gave its first performance, and remained its most persuasive performer.

Mengelberg spent the last years of his life under the cloud of a deserved reputation for pro-German sympathies (and for conducting in Germany) during the World War II occupation of Holland. Earlier, he had championed the music of the Jewish Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud, and in the Hitler-time he helped Jewish orchestra musicians escape. Because of his eminence in national life, he was barred from musical activity, and until his death in 1951 lived in forced retirement in Switzerland. His death seemed to efface some of the bitterness toward him in Holland. A memorial concert was given in Amsterdam just nine days after he died; it was played by his beloved Concertgebouw Orchestra, and conducted by Otto Klemperer, himself a Jewish refugee from Hitler. Nonetheless, his complaisant behavior toward the hated Nazis had destroyed his career, and his sad end provides many cautionary lessons for those artists who would cooperate with tyranny.

But when Mengelberg was working with the Philharmonic, this denouement was still some years in the future. His first recordings with the orchestra, made by the old acoustic process, included *Les Préludes* of Liszt, the Beethoven *Coriolan* and the Weber *Oberon* overtures, a movement of the Beethoven Fifth Symphony, and the second and fourth movements of the Tchaikovsky Pathétique Symphony. But acoustic recordings, for all their value in documenting the voices of the golden age of Italian operatic singing, are usually but travesties of the real sound of an

1 Pearl GEMM CD 9474.

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orchestra. And so it is to Mengelberg's electrical recordings with the Philharmonic, made at the very dawn of this vastly superior process, that we must look for information on just what he achieved as a conductor in New York.

The Mengelberg electrical Philharmonic recordings, all for the Victor Red Seal label, begin with a 1925 performance of Wagner's Overture to *Der fliegende Holländer*; the next Mengelberg recording with the Philharmonic, made in January of 1928, is again of Wagner, this time the *Waldweben* from *Siegfried*. At the end of the same year, Mengelberg and the Philharmonic recorded the Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*. They recorded several shorter pieces in January of the next year, including the Coronation March from Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, Saint-Saëns *Le Rouet d'Omphale*, the "War March of the Priests" from Mendelssohn's *Athalie*, a suite from Handel's *Alcina*, the famous Air from J. S. Bach's Suite in D major, and J. C. Bach's Sinfonia, opus 18, no. 2, in B flat major. At the end of 1929, Mengelberg and the Philharmonic recorded the Beethoven Third Symphony, the *Eroica*; in January of 1930, they recorded the Beethoven First Symphony. In the same month, they also recorded the overtures to Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Beethoven's *Egmont*, and Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. The Pearl CD includes all the performances listed above, with four exceptions, the last three of them major: the Wagner overture, the Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*, and the two Beethoven symphonies.[2] While one might lament the relatively small number of Mengelberg recordings with the Philharmonic, there is still enough here, not just to afford high musical pleasure, but to pass judgments both on Mengelberg in his prime as a musician, and on the New York Philharmonic as it entered the Toscanini era. These judgments are overwhelmingly favorable, and in making them we will learn much that is surprising about the standards and goals of musical performance sixty and more years ago.

The great distinction of these recordings leaps out from the pre-Romantic works with which the Pearl CD opens. It is now the fashion for musicians and critics to assume unthinkingly that the 1920s and before were a musical dark age, a time when Handel and Bach, not to mention Bach's sons, were either not played at all or, if played, so mangled that their music was not recognizable.

The Pearl CD gives the lie to this fatuous (and often self-serving) assumption. In Mengelberg's performance, the *Alcina* Suite is Handel before the age of Handel specialists. Here is Handel performed without the attempt to be anything more than *musically* authentic: here is vital rhythm, a half-century before the authentic-performance specialists discovered—and exaggerated—short upbeats; what makes the rhythm so gripping is its foundation in the conductor's strong feeling for pulse and tempo, a feeling that extends throughout whole movements rather than peters out, as so often happens today, in heedless forward motion. Mengelberg manages another miracle in the Handel: he makes the varied tempos of the separate movements cohere, so that each successive speed is both different and related to what has gone before.

Mengelberg's miracle in the slow movement—the famous "Air on the G String"—from the Bach Suite is nothing less than the glorious playing of a glorious melody. He uses Mahler's arrangement, and thereby gives us some insight into Mahler's own dedication to this music. Doubtless the incredibly moving string tone owes much to the use of gut, rather than the later steel-

2 The Overture to *Der fliegende Holländer* originally appeared on Victor 6547, and I am not aware that it has ever been transferred to LP or CD. *Ein Heldenleben* was available for a time in the 1970s on an English RCA LP, SMA 7001. The Beethoven First Symphony was transferred to LP some years ago on Educational Media Associates RR-501; the Beethoven Third Symphony originally appeared on Victor 7439/45, and does not seem to have ever been transferred to LP or CD. It is to be hoped that Pearl will soon reissue these important performances.

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wound, strings; the quality of consolation—for life and in life—must equally come from Mengelberg's own passionate attachment to the melody, and his ability to transmit that attachment to his musicians.

Mengelberg and the Philharmonic's playing of the J. C. Bach Sinfonia possesses all the virtues of their Handel, with perhaps an even greater depth of string tone, and a marvelously elegant oboe solo by the great Bruno Labate. J. C. Bach, like all of his contemporaries, is now played, as it were, by the yard: conductorial reputations on record —one thinks immediately of that of Neville Marriner—are currently made not by how specially each piece is played in itself, but by how many pieces the conductor manages to tape. Here Mengelberg conveys the impression that this piece is not just the most beautiful and absorbing piece of J. C. Bach, but is the most beautiful and absorbing piece in the world.

The Mozart and Beethoven overtures are among the incontestably great works of our tradition. Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, including its overture, has now achieved cultic significance, while Beethoven's music to Goethe's prose tragedy *Egmont* is now ignored, save for its oft-played overture. But familiar as these two overtures are, Mengelberg treats them as special, and as conceptually free-standing. In the Mozart, the opening chords are models of precise ensemble, played without the tonal tightness that the drive for orchestral accuracy so often engenders; the fugal passages with which the work abounds are played not just correctly, but with the greatest delicacy. In the *Egmont*, Mengelberg's canvas is properly much larger. Here is not only wonderful orchestral playing, including once again Labate's oboe and also the horns, led by the famous Bruno Jaenicke; Mengelberg also provides an amalgam of strength and warmth, each quality making up one half of Beethoven's genius. The effect of Mengelberg's performance is so natural, as if he and the orchestra had played the piece together every day of their lives. In this regard, it is instructive to compare the comfort of this Mengelberg performance with the knife-like edge of Toscanini's 1939 NBC Symphony broadcast performance of the work;[3] the impression conveyed by Toscanini is not one of comfort with the music's splendor, but of the almost angry discovery of the music for the first time.

The rest of the Pearl CD, including music of Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Wagner, Humperdinck, and Saint Saëns, seems of less interest, not because of any less value in its performance, but because the works themselves seem to ask for less from us as listeners. For what is more significant of Mengelberg and the Philharmonic, we must go to their major recordings that are as yet unreleased on CD.

The best-known of these recordings, both because it was very successful on its release and because it has been available on an LP transfer, is the Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*. Opinions vary about this enormous work: for some, including me, the work's many beautiful passages are overwhelmed by Strauss's tendency (at least in this period of his development) to a self-regarding vulgarity. But though rather less-played than such earlier Strauss tone poems as *Don Juan*, *Tod und Verklärung*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Don Quixote* (and perhaps even *Also Sprach Zarathustra*), *Ein Heldenleben* retains its place in the repertory as an orchestral, and therefore as a conductor's, showpiece. And that is how Mengelberg treats the work. Considering the fact that the performance was recorded in 1928, using the still primitive technology then available, the orchestral writing is amazingly clear. Compare, for example, the precise execution of the mammoth opening arpeggio in the horns, cellos, and basses in the Mengelberg recording with the slippery and diffuse playing of the Vienna Philharmonic in the composer's own 1944 recording; the reason for the superiority of Mengelberg lies in his willingness to alter Strauss's phrasing so that what the composer wrote

3 Toscanini's performance, from a broadcast, was to be found several years ago in an Arturo Toscanini Recording Association LP album, ATRA-3011.

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might be heard.[4] The comparison of the two performances is instructive in another regard as well: given all the yards of writing these days about how much more composers know than mere performers about how their music should be played, it is remarkable just how much more persuasive Mengelberg's performance of this inescapably rhetorical work is than that of Strauss. And no consideration of the Mengelberg recording can possibly omit a tribute to the splendid solo violin playing of the Philharmonic's concertmaster, the now-forgotten Scipione Guidi.

Finally, we come to the Beethoven symphonies. As was the case with the *Egmont* Overture, the required comparisons are with Toscanini. There can be no doubt that Toscanini's Beethoven symphonies are on the highest level of any of the performances of these works of which we have recorded (or concert-hall) evidence. I have earlier referred to Toscanini's performance of the *Egmont* as sounding like an almost angry discovery; for Toscanini, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Beethoven—and despite Toscanini's much-demanded fidelity to the notes and nothing but the notes, he must indeed have had a mental image of the composer—was not so much human as mythic; the operative myth must have been something like Prometheus defying Zeus. The result was that Toscanini's Beethoven belonged not to heaven, if by heaven we mean a place of divine mercy to man and human love for God; his Beethoven belonged to the pagan heavens of the gods and their terrors.[5] What marks Toscanini's Beethoven is not love for man, but always a strict love, and often a painful love, for music.

By contrast, Mengelberg's Beethoven belongs to this world. The tone is always rich, always vibrant; the notes, no matter how short, are always rounded; the rhythm, no matter how pert, are always fully sounded, never snapped off; even the most powerfully made gestures are always shapely, never angular. Every melody is not just sung, but shaped. Strange as it is to say so, in Mengelberg's *Eroica*, the opening melody in the cellos is played almost tenderly, as if heroes too can be gentle. And the orchestral playing is superb; merely to listen to the opening of the last movement of the First Symphony, with its treacherously exposed passage for the first violins, and to the equally treacherously exposed passage for the horns in the scherzo of the *Eroica*, is to know that the Philharmonic in 1930 (due to Toscanini as well as to Mengelberg) was a supremely great orchestra.

How did Mengelberg achieve his results? He must have had a marvelous ear, and he was willing to take infinite pains over details, taking excruciatingly many minutes at the beginning of each rehearsal to tune the orchestra.[6] In at least one rather obvious respect, he was a very old-fashioned conductor: unlike today's businesslike and efficient leaders, Mengelberg liked to lecture the orchestra, it often seemed by the hour, about

4 Mengelberg's rephrasing in this passage, as elsewhere, is documented in Bernard Shore's *The Orchestra Speaks* (1938), as quoted in David Wooldridge's *Conductor's World* (1970).

5 Toscanini's Beethoven is mostly now known in the NBC recordings made by RCA in the late 1940s and early 1950s and widely available since then; they may easily be found on CD. An exceptionally stern Toscanini/NBC 1939 performance of the *Eroica* was reissued in the last years of the LP on a Japanese RCA LP, RCL-3348. The First, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh symphonies, with Toscanini conducting the not-quite-world-class BBC Symphony Orchestra in the years from 1935 to 1939, were available several years ago on LP as EMI EX 29 0930 3. Toscanini's famous 1936 recording of the Seventh Symphony with the Philharmonic is now available, along with a 1933 recording (unissued at the time) of the Fifth Symphony, on a Pearl CD set, GEMM CDS 9373. Furthermore, a 1936 aircheck of the Fourth Symphony was available some years ago on a Swiss LP, Relief 821. Despite many local differences, all these performances, done over a period of almost two decades, are quite consistent in the severity of their approach to the music.

6 Fascinating detail about this practice of Mengelberg's is provided by Bernard Shore in *The Orchestra Speaks*.

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the composers and the music to be played. Such an indirect approach was sometimes resented by the musicians. An old and perhaps unreliable Philharmonic story has the oboist Labate interrupting one of Mengelberg's extended talks with the trenchant words, "Hey Mist'! You talka too much." But conducting is at bottom a form of alchemy and perhaps even of necromancy; what counts is not the process but the outcome.

To sum up, then: as I listen to these recordings, three words come immediately to mind: brilliance, freedom, and warmth. I am tempted to add that the greatest of these is warmth. As much as Mengelberg may have demanded it, the brilliance belongs to the orchestra: virtuoso playing in the strings, the winds, and the brass; razor-sharp ensemble, and, above all, a feeling for ensemble playing always attentive to the playing of other instruments and other sections. The freedom was Mengelberg's: more accelerandos and ritardandos than are fashionable today in our musically prim age; violent dynamic contrasts, often combined with major changes in basic tempos; perhaps most significant, a willingness on his part to vary the explicit demands of the printed notation, either to make the performance more faithful to what Mengelberg divined were the composer's intentions, or to make the music more communicable to the audience. But it is the warmth in these performances that takes pride of place: an intensely human quality in melodic playing, especially in the strings, that always seems to speak personally and directly. It is hardly too much to apply to these performances the words that Cardinal Newman, a passionate lover of the violin and of the Beethoven quartets, chose for his motto: *cor ad cor loquitur*—the heart speaks to the heart. Can there be greater praise for a conductor—or for an orchestra?

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Theater

Henry IV; monologists III

by Donald Lyons

The recent staging by the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theater of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2, as directed by JoAnne Akalaitis, provided food for thought. The plays are, of course, the great epic of England, the true English *Aeneid*, comprising, along with *Richard II* and *Henry V*, both panorama and meditation. What are the sources of grace and health in a society? What do unhappy, partial societies look like? How might a young man, in the course of claiming his identity, bring himself into a right alignment with his father and his destiny, which is to heal a torn world? Shakespeare was writing about such things with one eye on his dramatic time, the early 1400s, and one eye on the roiled Tudor waters of the 1590s. And he had a concern for such problems for, so to speak, their own sakes—abstracted from time—and not just as constituents of the matter of England, as can be felt in the (roughly contemporary) *Julius Caesar*, with its Caesar-Marc Antony relationship, and in the also contemporary *Hamlet*, with its King Hamlet-Prince Hamlet relationship. In the two parts of *Henry IV* Shakespeare achieved perhaps his most breathtaking synthesis of history and family, of high and low, of war and peace. The plays could scarcely be more relevant to a time of exalted hedonisms, collapsing ideologies, and centrifugal malaise.

The good news is that Miss Akalaitis suffered the history in the plays to come to us by and large unfettered by updating hokum. The larger movements were intelligibly articulated: for example, the old King clad in blue velvet in a setting out of the *Très riches heures* worried about a tainted throne and a wayward heir; the battle of Shrewsbury, some of it fought in slow motion, made sense; in Part 2, the sleepless old King paced on a ramp above his sleeping subjects; at Gaultree, dark, angular shadows rose behind and somehow embodied the treachery of the parley (though WWI-style films projected right afterward were a bit of overkill); the final father-son confrontation was played for simple emotion in an uncluttered way; the closing apparition of Hal in majesty on a kind of sliding prow with fluorescent lighting telegraphed the central point, even if, fashionably, overaccenting his rigid brutality in rejecting Falstaff.

So the big bites of history were surprisingly digestible at the Public. And the cuisine was just slightly nouvelle: Hal in jeans and T-shirt in the tavern, but in proper black mourning coat at Windsor when his father is dead—this scene very evocative of the four sons of George V at his bier, with a witty visual hit at the Edward VIII aspect of Hal. And Hal was well performed, with an appropriate mix of charm, egoism, and sincerity, by Thomas Gibson. Mr. Gibson never trifled with Hal's spine, his development from playboy to anointed monarch, taking seriously what called for it, from his first soliloquy ("I know you all") promising reformation and redemption to the final awesome epiphany. In Mr.

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Gibson one could recognize the man Samuel Johnson thus described: "In his idle hours he is rather loose than wicked, and when the occasion forces out his latent qualities, he is great without effort, and brave without tumult. The trifler is roused into a hero, and the hero again reposes in the trifler. The character is great, original, and just."

But Hal was surrounded by baser metals, in both serious and comic roles. Larry Bryggman's Henry IV was merely pompous and orotund; Jared Harris's Hotspur inarticulate (and the actor is British) and unmartial. This is the way of the Public: if they do not choke Shakespeare to death with trendy gimmickry, they smother him with stiffly arthritic oratory. On the whole, smothering is better. Some historical air gets through. I saw the two plays in the spacious, comfortable Newman Theater in an audience full of eager students. I took my young goddaughter, who came fresh to the plays, liked Hal, and started reading them the next day. This is a decent, if modest, accomplishment—albeit more pedagogical than specifically theatrical—and deserves a salute in a climate of curricula that treat Shakespeare as a "fetish" ripe for deconstruction.

But it would be idle to pretend that Miss Akalaitis has managed to put on an adequate representation of these amazing plays. The area where she was greatly tempted and where she greatly fell was, as one would imagine, the roistering tavern low life centering around Falstaff. Now Falstaff is, in the study, a great principle of life and laughter (if, half the time, we smile only when we have read the note explaining the joke). He is the Lord of Misrule, as C. L. Barber made clear in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, still unsurpassed as a work of Shakespeare criticism; he is holiday. And it was Shakespeare's task to paint holiday in its wittiest, most appealing colors while yet "placing" holiday as but a partial and sometimes vicious mode of being. It seems almost impossible for contemporary directors to create "holiday" on stage without indulging in the tackiest faddism. Miss Akalaitis's tavern folk enacted an extra's dream: they were given license to swill and belch and pass wind and grope and simulate copulation ad lib. Each chalk-faced, plastic-raincoated roisterer performed a loud little dramalet of his or her own. With a lazy literalism anarchy was thus mimed anarchically. The result was a blur. And things got worse in Part 2, with Pistol (same actor as Hotspur; same problems) vrooming in and out on a motorcycle; Mistress Quickly a repellent ranter; and the low lifes declining in appearance and conduct from mannequins out of *Cabaret* to zombies out of *Night of the Living Dead*. That these were desperate stabs at cardiopulmonary resuscitation and not a comprehensive health plan was made obvious by the presence in their midst of a numbingly tedious, traditional, textbooky, unfunny Falstaff (the inert Louis Zorich). A radical attempt to rethink the popular scenes could scarcely have ignored the possibilities of Falstaff as potential Lord of Mob Rule. As it was, by creating a grotesque, "lumpen" underworld and a marmoreal, calculating court Miss Akalaitis threw all sympathy to the politicians. Significantly, the one comic scene that looked alive (ladders, rural backdrop) and played well was the Gadshill caper, which of course involved the Prince in an active capacity. The upshot was that we could not wait for Hal to be quit of these monstrous, cacaphonous, unintelligible creeps. So slippery was the fashionably "alienating" iconography employed by this production that it gave us in effect a (doubtless unintentionally) authoritarian—I will not say fascist—reading of the *Henrys*.

The gently comic Shallow scenes in rustic Gloucestershire in Part 2 were not jazzed up, but neither were they brought to life. Miss Akalaitis went for the pathos and nostalgia in Shallow. A bleakly wintry light played over his scenes. (Here and throughout, the virtuosic sensitivity of Jennifer Tipton's lighting seemed closer to Shakespeare than much else on stage. Has Miss Tipton thought of directing?) But the scenes played like a dirge. This, added to the general mess made of the tavern scenes, prompted a counsel of despair: are these comic scenes, so full of idiom and nonce words and topical allusion, in fact play-

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able at all today? Most productions I've seen in fact marginalize the comic text and invent para-plays featuring pratfalls and slapstick and vaudevillean vocabulary in general in an attempt to keep audiences awake and laughing while the actual words are swallowed, belched, etc. Miss Akalaitis has merely substituted her notion of Beckett or Genet for the Marx Brothers in a fresh attempt to distract the spectators. It is sleight of hand; it is not a solution. Perhaps the problem will continue to seem insoluble until a genius shows the fly the way out of the bottle.

A familiar Public Theater "correctness" was manifest in the *Henrys* in such "nontraditional" casting as a Hispanic Poins, pal of the Prince (barely worthy of notice save that this Poins lapses into Spanish and Spanglish, asking Hal to "marry my seeester"), a black Archbishop of York, and a black Lady Percy, wife to Hotspur. Poins was OK, the Archbishop stolid, and Lady Percy a writhing nymphomaniac. Startling assignments such as black children of white parents or vice versa were this time avoided, largely, one feels, by accident. What to make of this programmatic and growing practice? In principle, it is not objectionable. The days of confining black tragedians to *Othello* are gone; all-black productions of the classics are few and far between. Hence black actors will play Hamlet, and ought to, whilst white actresses continue to play not only Ophelia but also Gertrude. I feel about interracial casting (even in familial structures) as Dr. Johnson did about the unities of time and place: "The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria and the next at Rome supposes that when the play opens the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theater has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. . . . The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players." The spectators know from the first that (let us imagine) James Earl Jones is not really King Lear of ancient Britain and that (let us imagine) Anjelica Huston is not really his daughter Goneril. Thus a filiation between the two rests entirely within the powers of two such qualified performers to simulate for an evening's traffic. (Note that this line of reasoning cannot be used to champion "gender-neutral" casting.)

In practice, the new racial democracy of casting can be abused and can be an instrument of covert ideology. A de facto quota system, so patronizing and harmful to minorities, can result in untrained actors' being tossed into the deep end of the pool to make a pretty picture. And productions can exploit minority players in the service of such agendas as the trashing of Western culture. And the Public has, shall we say, shown little awareness of these abuses *qua* abuses; indeed, it often flaunts the abuse *as* the use. Still, the principle, to my thinking, stands.

Three shows in which actresses impersonate—alone on the stage—celebrated writing women have lately played in New York. The English actress Eileen Atkins did Virginia Woolf in the act of delivering her famous lectures at Girton College, Cambridge, in *A Room of One's Own*. The Broadway legend Julie Harris pretended to be Isak Dinesen at the age of seventy-three in *Lucifer's Child*. The television comedienne Tracey Ullman enacted, in *The Big Love*, the Los Angeles waitress and memoirist called Florence Aadland.

The most intellectually challenging, but at the same time the most irritating, of the three was the Woolf. Adapted from the 1928 lectures by English theater hand Patrick Garland, the play, seen here in the attractive Lamb's Theatre, presents the writer striding about an odd sort of library-*cum*-podium and addressing the audience as Woolf did her original bunch of young women students. It is surprising how much and in what ways the revered feminist tract dates. In the first bit, she waxes indignant over being shooed off the grass "where centuries ago . . . the swine rootled" by a Beadle, described as "a curious-looking object in a cut-away coat and an evening shirt." Only Fellows are per-

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mitted off the gravel, it seems. And only men can be Fellows. Fair enough objection, but we note the clumsy excess of contempt and superiority in that "object." Next, prodigies of loathing are heaped upon the meager repast she is proffered at a women's college: plain soup, plates with no pattern (!), greens and potatoes "suggesting . . . women with string bags on Monday morning," prunes, dry biscuit. It is all a felt, envious outrage, especially as somewhere equivalent men are enjoying partridges, wine, cigars. Dear Mrs. Woolf, those dons probably dropped dead soon afterwards of apoplexy and cholesterol; how healthily you, by contrast, dined. *Tempora mutantur*. . .

Then she is off to the British Museum to conjure up straw men to burn: an unnamed, misogynous Professor, "not . . . attractive to women . . . heavily built . . . great jowl . . . laughed at, to adopt the Freudian theory, in his cradle by a pretty girl." A similarly unnamed Bishop who has pontificated that cats do not go to heaven just as women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare bites the dust. Woolf is moved to conjure up her famous, lachrymosely sentimental saga of writer Judith Shakespeare, sister to William ("she was very young"), doin' 'erself in due to bein' heavy wi' a bairn by actor-manager Nick Greene ("who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?"). It sounds less like a conceivable Elizabethan scenario than a Thomas Hardy plot, and Hardy was someone Woolf condescended to in general. It is all supposed to illustrate why no women's writing survives from Elizabeth times. Dear Mrs. Woolf, had you done real and not mock research in the BM you might have pioneered in the recovery of those very Elizabethan women writers who now adorn the latest Norton anthologies.

Woolf then drops in on—with, as it were, hot soup from the big house—some nineteenth-century women novelists: Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot. Her gracious eye sees little more than this: "*Villette*, *Emma*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Middlemarch* were written by women with little more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman." Woolf also seems to think that Charlotte Brontë was denied "experience and intercourse and travel." Dear Mrs. Woolf, did you actually read *Villette* or stop to ponder why those prisoners of the parlor wrote novels so much greater than yours? (I must mention here the essay by Q. D. Leavis, "Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century," which deals with Woolf's topics in a far more serious and enlightening way.)

Woolf's peroration stresses the enabling tranquility that material comfort can bestow by defanging sex hatred (here Woolf rises to wisdom), and it envisions the rebirth of Judith Shakespeare's spirit, parceled out among her auditors. The lecture is vintage Woolf: a lively fancy corrupted by smugness, snobbery, and dilettantish aestheticism. As an experience in the theater, it resembled being harangued by a gabby games mistress speaking in the rhythms of Lady Bracknell. Eileen Atkins was like Joyce Grenfell playing tragedy. From a withering height, Miss Atkins ladled a full tablespoon of sarcasm over each dose of prose. The sneered vowels of "swine rootled" took at least five minutes to traverse. Cats' not going to heaven and women's inability to write Shakespeare were enunciated as such parallel absurdities that the sleepiest student must have jotted the point down in her notebook. Woolf's own precious legacy of £500 per annum had dropped into her lap when an aunt fell off a horse "when she was riding out to take the air in Bombay." Lady Bracknell never intoned "in a handbag" with half the hauteur Miss Atkins brought to "in Bombay." It got its laugh, but, as often in Woolf, at the expense of a person who, if not toting a string bag, anyway died doing something we of Bloomsbury are entitled to regard as absurd. *A Room of One's Own* is a paradigm of liberalism: the rich, with fastidious and scarcely conscious condescension, proposing a fantasy version of their own experience as a model for the lower (not the middle) orders.

Lucifer's Child displays, in the first act, the Danish fabulist Isak Dinesen in 1958 about to

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sail for America on her first visit. She is packing a trunk with clothes, all of which have humorous names: Cape of Good Hope, a dress called Sober Truth, gloves called Tristan and Isolde. But the packing is pretense: what she actually does is doll herself up in one quaint rig from her past after another, beginning with a Pierrot get-up from childhood, and reminisce, with the costumes as mnemonics. This script, confected by William Luce, "based on the writings of Isak Dinesen," reduces the Baroness Blixen to a rickety Blanche DuBois, "rootling" (if Mrs. Woolf will permit the word's application to a swan, not a swine) through her past. Most of her champagne-fuelled memories are of Africa: her husband (he infected her with syphilis), her lover (he died in a plane crash), various noble and devoted natives. It is all verbatim from her beautiful and familiar memoir, *Out of Africa*, which was already extensively drawn on in the colorful Meryl Streep movie. Some anecdotal material is added, which seems designed to flesh out her political correctness: she had a ferociously feminist aunt who stormed the Danish Parliament to denounce men; she actually says that "the superiority of the white race is an illusion"; she repents of her slaughtering of animals and wearing of furs as a "cosmic disrespect"; while anti-Nazi, she treats the prospect of a Communist Denmark with a giggle; she has an enlightened attitude to syphilis sufferers and a benign superiority to God. All this the audience adored.

The second act took place in April 1959. She is back from New York with stories of the Stage Deli and Marilyn Monroe. She is weak by now and ill, fainting on pillows and dreaming ever more intently of flying over Africa long ago with her lover among the eagles.

Julie Harris poured into this impersonation all her immense technique and panting sincerity. She hit a hundred winning notes to Miss Atkins's one; she knew a thousand ways of shyly retarding a beat; she ran her hand over a wardrobe just as would a woman who had lived with it in the room for seventy years. A real artist is at work here, but her material, alas, is meretricious. Miss Harris has made a habit of performing in (and sometimes commissioning) these famous-women soliloquies; she has by now played Mary Lincoln, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Brontë, Nora Joyce, Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, and Sofia Tolstoy. One begins to see what *she* sees these women as having in common—a certain eccentric possession, perhaps. May I suggest she give these types a rest and try a real role once again—say, Mary Tyrone?

Mr. Luce has already written *Brontë* for Julie Harris and, for others, *Zelda* (Mrs. Fitzgerald, of course) and *Lillian*, a day in the life of Lillian Hellman. Did we, I wonder, see Lillian primping for her HUAC turn? May I suggest *Elena* for Mr. Luce? Madame Ceausescu might be right up his alley.

But it does not wash. These bioplays bear the same relationship to drama as a blurb does to a book. Pick a key date; give your subject some busy work on stage; have her (or him, of course) rehearse highlights in the life; season with wisecracks and political correctness and celebrity gossip; build to a teary finale as dimming lights imply the imminence of death. If possible, cannibalize the subject's own writing for dramatic recitation, as Mr. Luce does here, egregiously. However this fundamentally kitschy genre arose (did it effectively begin with Emlyn Williams reading from the works of Dickens in the guise of Dickens?), its jejune formulas are now a mere nuisance, scarcely distinguishable from those PBS "interviews" a while back (did I dream them?) with Cleopatra and Buddha.

It was Hegel, I believe, who said the owl of Minerva takes wing at twilight. Just when a form seems finished there arrives a satisfying justification for it. The author of *Tru*, Jay Presson Allen, and her daughter, Brooke Allen, have adapted their present subject's memoir into a comic work that is enough to send the genre into the night with a blessing on its head. Yet again, a flamboyant eccentric is scatterbrainedly cramming a suitcase, playing old records, guzzling liquor, smoking cigarettes, and babbling compulsively about

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her moment in the sun. It is 1961; we are in the living room of one of those squat Los Angeles bungalows in the company of a forty-ish waitress with one artificial foot, two husbands, and a daughter, Beverly, whom she, when Beverly was fifteen, more or less pimped to a fiftyish satyr, film star Errol Flynn, who died just before fulfilling his "promise" to marry the girl. It is amusing to speculate what the fastidious aristocrats Dinesen and Woolf would have made of Florence Aadland. Dinesen, in fact, met a similar type in Monroe, but Dinesen saw Monroe in the falsifying, pretentious company of Arthur Miller and Carson McCullers and mistook her character completely. With *The Big Love*, the form perfectly expresses a person. Bawdy, tawdry, pathetic, funny, like some Faulkner flibbertigibbet plopped down into the world of James M. Cain, the Texas-born Aadland is an emblem of those rootless, empty, nomadic, tabloid lives that throve in the post-Depression margins of American life. Lolita would have recognized a fellow spirit—not so much in sexual precocity (although Florence had a child at fourteen) but in a certain sad at-homeness amid the detritus of American pop culture and its induced aspirations.

In the first act, Florence energetically sashays around the room in orange stretch-pants, happily recalling the glamour of Flynn; a sour note is struck when Beverly, off on a nightclub tour, will not take her mother's calls. (Flashed slides of celebrities—Flynn and Florence's ideal, Myrna Loy—decorate the monologue, just as African noises did Dinesen's.) In the second half, the afternoon and the mood and the music and the very clothes darken, as we learn of the fate of Beverly after Flynn's death (manslaughter of an importunate suitor; arrests for prostitution) and of the reason for Florence's packing (she is going to jail for endangering the welfare of her daughter). Half-admitting what her life has been, half-anaesthetizing herself with drink and pop music, Florence marches off, suitcase in hand and chin up, to who knows what further sordidness.

What was most refreshing in *The Big Love* was the lack of condescension or of sentimentalizing in the writing (Florence Aadland was not, after all, Truman Capote; she had only one name to drop; her life had to be evoked almost without proper names) and the playing. Tracey Ullman was vaguely familiar as a satirist good with accents, and many reviews spoke of her performance as campy and patronizing. But what Miss Ullman did was to work from the superficial grotesquerie of the woman down into the humanity within. Props like records and cosmetics and clothes were not nostalgic fetishes, as in *Lucifer's Child*, but funny rays of insight, morsels of life. Ullman honored what was vital and tough in the woman without softening her weak, reality-denying, and destructive sides—she created, in fact, a person of precisely Falstaffian complexity. Hers seemed to me the richest acting on Broadway this season. But more on Broadway next time.

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Art

Tradition-conscious

by Jed Perl

Melissa Meyer fills canvases with loosely brushed curvy shapes. She paints Abstract Expressionist amoebas. Meyer's paintings recall the elegance of second-generation Abstract Expressionism—the work of the mid-1950s. This artist doesn't invent anything new. And when I saw her paintings a couple of years ago at the Rosemary Erpf Gallery, I didn't find Meyer's color or brushwork especially lively. She didn't seem to have the powerful artistic personality needed to give old conventions new life. Yet people I trust saw more in those Meyer paintings than I saw—they felt that Meyer believed in those curvy forms. And now, after seeing Meyer's new paintings at the Holly Solomon Gallery in March, I think there must have been an element of conviction in those earlier Meyers that I missed. In the new paintings Meyer has achieved some depth; she's done what people saw her trying to do in that earlier work. The forms are the same ribbony plasmic forms. But the color and the paint handling have gained in fluidity. There's some spaciousness in the paintings now. The intermingling and overlapping of blues and greens and purples create a lustrous aquatic effect. Meyer is no longer merely evoking styles past. Now she's feeling the pressure of the past at her back, pushing her forward; she's showing how the past is relevant to the present. The impacted all-over space of Abstract Expressionism has become second nature to her. And she has given that space the slightly tacky opulence that is as close to hedonism as most artists can get today. In her earlier paintings, Meyer was trying to recapitulate the hard-boiled emotions of Abstract Expressionism. Now she is doing Abstract Expressionism in a contemporary key, and she's a better artist for it.

Depending on how an artist thinks about tradition, the past can be a refuge, a challenge, a prologue, or a paradigm. Then there are the dangers of academicism: the adoption of the look of the past without the structural logic that supported the surface effects. But the most dangerous aspect of tradition-consciousness is probably the tendency to believe that one can bring the emotional content of the past into the present. So far as I can see, there is no tradition of emotions. Academicism, in fact, is as often a matter of frozen emotions as of frozen forms. There is only a tradition of forms. A living tradition is a tradition that reexperiences the form language of the past in terms of the emotional content of the present. This is why tradition-consciousness is generally most successful when the past being regarded is a not too distant past. But it is a mark of the very greatest artists that they can personalize any past, no matter how distant, so that we end up thinking of it as theirs. (The *Belvedere Torso* is Michelangelo's antiquity.)

Twentieth-century artists changed the dimensions of the past—they enlarged it, so that it is now the global phenomenon, embracing African and Oriental and Middle Eastern and pre-Classical Greek art, that

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André Malraux called a Museum without Walls. By enlarging the stock of what could be viewed as part of a living tradition, the moderns enlarged their own options. Tradition-consciousness has never been as boldly personal and imaginatively adventuresome as it was in Europe between 1880 and 1930. But as tradition came to appear both more personal and more global, it became harder to pass it on. No one can any longer say with certainty what the essential matter of tradition is, and so the contemporary artist is perhaps the first artist to struggle to remain conscious of tradition at a time when tradition-consciousness has almost no status in the community at large. Tradition-consciousness is not even, by and large, any longer a value in the art schools. When artists complain about their sense of isolation, what they are often referring to is the strange experience of having to invent the very past that they will believe in. It's as if every tradition-conscious artist is now alone with a vision of some part of the past. Thus tradition, which has to do with forming a community with the past, can alienate an artist from the community of the present.

There are artists who might almost be said to make their distance from the present into their subject. I would say this is the case with William Bailey, who exhibited his recent works at the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery in February. Perhaps another way of saying the same thing is to say that Bailey believes that what we imagine to have been the emotional content of the past can be emotionally compelling in the present. The still lifes that make up the bulk of Bailey's output are airless and unreal —intentionally so. In a new book about Bailey,[1] the poet John Hollander explains, speaking of the still lifes, that Bailey "never looks at the objects while painting—and certainly never arranges them in a set-up." A still-life painter who does not paint from observation is doing something very odd: he's denying the immediacy of his relationship with objects. But in Bailey's case the oddity is in the service of an idea. Bailey isn't painting what he sees here and now, he's painting what he sees in the still lifes of the past— mostly Morandi's still lifes. More generally, he's painting a neoclassical world of sharp outlines and unambiguous forms. It's as if he's imagining the state of tradition before the moderns blew the whole thing sky high. (Morandi is a modern, but he has an Italian's equivocal feelings about the twentieth century.)

I have trouble with Bailey's paintings on a conceptual level: I think the view of tradition is too neatly fenced in—it's tradition as a locked room. Yet I know that the things that bother me about the Baileys are intentional. I am bothered by the way that the top and bottom edges of his objects read as straight lines that deny the volume of the objects; at the same time I know that this is meant to underscore the unreality of these objects. When I look at a Bailey painting, all I can think is, Give me something messy and unpredictable. In Bailey's work, the past has a velvet rope around it. And many people who are interested in tradition admire this work, with its fine patina. It is reassuring to look back on the past and see everything as finished and elegant. (That's how Diebenkorn chooses to see Matisse.)

While Bailey has given some of his still lifes American titles—there is a *Manhattan Still Life*—I think most people will see Italy in these terra-cotta compositions, and indeed many of the titles invoke Italy, where Bailey has a home. In the wake of the globalization of tradition, it is natural to want to renationalize tradition. (The Parisian moderns both globalized and renationalized: not too long after Primitivism came the cult of Corot.) Yet national tradition is a hypothesis that must be demonstrated formally. I would say that Bill Jensen, who has very consciously attached himself to an American tradition that he identifies with Ryder, Dove, and Hartley, sometimes demonstrates the tradition, sometimes does not. When his work does not succeed, it is perhaps because Jensen is rather overly protective of this American tradition.

1 *William Bailey*, with a foreword by Giulano Briganti and an introduction by John Hollander; Rizzoli, 176 pages, $45.

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Nevertheless, Jensen's show at the Washburn Gallery in March was his best show in a number of years. Jensen is a thoughtful, intelligent, imaginative painter. In some of the recent paintings he has returned to his practice of heavily impastoing the surface (at least in places). *Sea of Green*, in particular, recalls the gutsiness of Jensen's early-1980s abstractions. As a whole, the show demonstrated an impressive range. There were imaginary landscapes, and paintings made up of biomorphic forms that were sometimes floating free, sometimes locked in a dense atmosphere. The tradition that Jensen likes to make us believe is his—the tradition of the Americans that Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Rosenfeld admired, together with some European Surrealists like Tanguy—is, at least in Jensen's telling, a tradition with some range, some depth. Even the bad Jensens engage a viewer: they're knowledgeable, elegant, *felt* failures. Yet there was something disturbingly comfortable about the Jensen show. The artist has cocooned himself in his carefully thought-through view of the past. He has found himself a safe haven from the present. Maybe that's why the Jensen show, though admirable, didn't leave a strong impression.

A few weeks ago, in a gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, I ran into a friend who is a landscape painter. "There are so many figurative shows on right now, it's like old home week," she said. She was thinking of the Bailey show—and Philip Pearlstein at Hirschl & Adler Modern, Neil Welliver at Marlborough, Janet Fish at Robert Miller, and perhaps of Lennart Anderson, whose show was due to open at Davis & Langdale in April. It was old home week, because the confluence of these artists recalled the 1970s, when there was a sense of moment and mission around the younger representational painters. At least there seemed to be a sense of moment, to those who believed that formalist abstraction was in its death throes. But if younger figurative painters imagined that they held the key to tradition, the Color Field painters were equally convinced that they were the true heirs of tradition. Philip

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Pearlstein, in a note for an announcement of a show of work by still-life painter Leland Wallin, has reinvoked that 1970s ethos:

> The mainstream history of Modernist twentieth-century art is the story of various attempts on the part of European-oriented artists to accommodate the intuitive and the illogical with fragmented remnants of Florentine Renaissance art. This attempt to wed the two opposites accounts for much of the excitement and drama of Modernist art. . . . I believe that to a great degree, it is the current generation of Realist painters who are among the last defenders of these traditional values, not as being retrogressive, but as defenders of logic, for survival.

I wonder, though, if one can safely ascribe the role of defenders of "traditional values" to a group that is called the realists or a group that is called the abstractionists. By now the revolutions of Cubism and abstract art have as much reality as the Renaissance itself, so it seems that a relevant tradition could be found as easily by gaining access to the past through abstraction as through representation.

Pearlstein's show at Hirschl & Adler Modern in February was quite strong. The women and men who sit in the buff in the artist's studio are, with each successive group of paintings, more hemmed-in with upscale flea-market stuff: early-American folk art, toys, primitive art, along with the American Indian rugs that have been an element in the paintings for years. In a catalogue note, Pearlstein challenged future historians to work out the iconography, but I rather hope they won't. Is it any more than the stockpiling of a fanatical collector, a collector's version of tradition? There is also a formal strategy involved in the proliferation of objects. Pearlstein is keeping himself interested in his characteristic juxtapositions of flattened-out space and tightly rendered form. The danger that Pearlstein always runs is that he will become so skillful at painting the nude from odd angles that the work will begin to look slick and predictable. I felt that happening in his last show—everything looked over-finished. And here, especially when Pearlstein is articulating the forms of a face, his dogged interest in every crease and bulge can turn programmatic—then it's just conventional rendering. But he still does have an ability to keep himself—and us—surprised. The best painting in the show was *Kiddie Car-Plane, Airplane, and Models*, in which the airplane, suspended from the ceiling, is a red form cutting the composition in half diagonally. I thought the painting of figures sitting amidst primitive idols and a Godzilla toy was interesting. The only objects that do not work in the paintings are the cast-iron statues of black people. They carry a freight of history that Pearlstein cannot possibly encompass with his deadpan what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach. (There are fewer of these figures here than there were in the last show.) With Pearlstein, tradition is a straightforward equation. He juxtaposes realist rendering (the heritage of the nineteenth century) with the simple surface designs of postwar American abstract art. He brings this clash of traditions together through the willfulness of his technique. He's lived through this confrontation of flat and volumetric in every inch of every painting. He paints with such persistence, you can't help but know that he's for real.

Pearlstein's work is slated to be in the Whitney Biennial this spring. He is one of a group of elder statesmen showing this year—there is generally such a group, only it is larger this time around. Joan Mitchell is among this group, too. One understands that Pearlstein and Mitchell are included in the show in much the spirit that de Kooning and Louise Bourgeois were included a few years ago: as precursors, as the living tradition.

How the Whitney makes these particular choices is a matter of interest. I'd say it's because these artists validate the work of younger artists. The downtown audience that thinks of David Salle and Eric Fischl as the archetypal figurative artists may find something to admire in the work of Philip Pearlstein. As the Neoexpressionists have moved into a more traditional idea of form,

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their work has at moments, in passages, gotten to look Pearlsteinish. Joan Mitchell —who is painting better now than she has in years—is becoming a popular figure. Her work is seeing a lot of action in the resale market. There are art fairs that have so many Joan Mitchells they look like mini Mitchell retrospectives. And she's also turned out to be an inspiration (especially now that de Kooning has virtually vanished) for young artists who have a taste for Abstract Expressionism. I just happened to notice, in an article that Irving Sandler wrote about Mitchell in 1958, the observation that "Mitchell considers herself a 'conservative' in that her pictures are in the tradition of de Kooning, Kline, etc." That Pearlstein and Mitchell are at the Biennial tells us that tradition is in some sense chic. But it also tells us that a commitment to the past can help an artist to survive—artistically, of course, but career-wise, too. So Pearlstein and Mitchell will be at the Biennial as a fashion statement about tradition. However they got in, it's better that they're in than not in.

People still pay attention to tradition, even if much of the attention is just lip service. This is from a show brochure that arrived yesterday: "To be a painter now takes both a deep historical awareness and an ability to start out fresh each time you pick up the brush." I would say that the painter who is the subject of this remark has neither the depth nor the freshness, but we are better off that the remark is made than that it is not made. Sometimes I go around SoHo, and I feel that it's just one personal statement about historical awareness after another. Surely Arthur Cohen, who exhibited recent paintings at the Stephen Rosenberg Gallery in March, thinks of himself as a traditional artist. Cohen's basic unit is the rectangular canvas—that is traditional. And Cohen's idea of making paintings out of a number of rectangular canvases abutting one another on the wall can also probably be regarded as traditional. After all, people have been doing shaped canvases for decades. After seeing Cohen's show, I went to see Elizabeth Dworkin's paintings at the Victoria Munroe Gallery. Dworkin probably also regards herself as a traditional artist; there are many precedents for including representational elements—in this case bits of cityscape—in an abstract painting. The same day I saw Greg Colson's wall sculptures at Sperone Westwater. And for all I know, Colson, whose constructions use various sorts of found materials, also sees himself as working within a tradition—the Dadaist tradition. I could go on and mention other shows, but probably these three make the point.

I have been rather horrified to read about Vito Acconci's recent work—some oversized brassieres that double as seating units, at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery—in articles where these contraptions are discussed as if they were part of a distinguished tradition. All traditions are not equal. Which does not mean that the greatest traditions are necessarily the usable ones. Great traditions are not even necessarily, as they influence the present, good news. We have all seen talented artists who have been undone by their obsession with some grand tradition—by their hopeless desire to match Caravaggio or Poussin. Artists have to ask themselves what they're capable of comprehending of the past. To know how much of the past one can comprehend is to know one's own limits, to know oneself in the mirror of the past. Melissa Meyer, concentrating her attention on the little tradition of second-generation Abstract Expressionism, has hit her stride.

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Books

Life, chance, and Charles Darwin

by Guy Davenport

Fate remains the enigma. Some chance event at the beginning of our lives keys in its plot. That this is so is the understanding of both folklore and the highest fiction. Dick Whittington's cat, the stone embedded in a snowball and thrown in random mischief, the kite that caught on fire. There is a scene in *Charles Darwin*, John Bowlby's abundantly detailed biography,[1] in which we see Darwin relaxing on a sofa at Down House. He is reading George Eliot. Around him are his meticulously catalogued library, his notebooks, microscope, stacks of scientific journals. He is the preeminent scientist of his century and of ours. The great theory which he began to suspect as a young naturalist on the long voyage of *The Beagle* (1832-1836) was one in which chance opened possibility after possibility over millions of years, so that the offspring of creatures now known only by fossils worked out a genetic fate. The bear, the wolf, and the dog are children of the same mother. Gratuitous modifications nudged each other toward divergent fates. George Eliot wrote about such things as they modified human lives in a few years; Darwin, as all of creation is modified over eons.

Darwin and his theory stand parallel to Marx and his. Their energies have radiated from the nineteenth century with something like the force of religious movements. They are theories with embattled histories. (Marx and Engels saw in Darwin a justification for their materialism, but a copy of *Das Kapital*, inscribed to Darwin by Marx, still sits in Darwin's library, its pages uncut.)

Even before the publication of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) the theory had become a collaboration. Alfred Russel Wallace, the British naturalist who had been up the Amazon with H. E. Bates and had in the Malay archipelago come to the conclusion that species transmute according to the advantages they have in their environment, proved to be not a rival but an ally. Thomas Henry Huxley in England and Ernst Haeckel in Germany took up the cause. The theory was born in some sense prematurely, for geology had not yet given Darwin the time needed, and Gregor Mendel's work in genetics was as yet unknown. T. R. Malthus's studies of population growth and food supply fed into the theory, as did the accumulated information of pigeon and horse breeding which Darwin could consult at any English farm. We have come to misunderstand the latter part of Darwin's title, "by means of natural selection," by which he meant that nature has its way of selective breeding, and that its purpose is the same as mankind's in evolving the domestic dog from the wolf, a sturdier horse, a faster pigeon.

In the century and a half since its inception, Darwin's theory has been under constant study toward its verification. It has no scientific rival. John Bowlby, in this new biog-

1 *Charles Darwin: A New Life*, by John Bowlby; Norton, 511 pages, $24.95.

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raphy, is careful to demonstrate that Darwin was researching and offering proof for a theory of evolution rather than initiating it. He channeled into an orderly flow tributaries that go back to his grandfather Erasmus Darwin, to Lamarck and Cuvier, to Goethe, to many geologists, and even to Lucretius and Ovid.

John Bowlby (who died soon after completing this biography, last year) was a British psychiatrist who had a long and distinguished career as a doctor at the Tavistock Clinic, as a researcher in the United States (at the National Institute of Mental Health at Bethesda and at Stanford), and as an author of several studies of parenting, juvenile delinquency, and of the role of affection in families. It was this latter interest that brought him to write a book about Darwin, who was born into a large family which for two generations had been scientists, engineers, industrialists, and well-to-do landowners, and yet who, despite his genius, was a sufferer of neuroses, constant illnesses (he vomited every afternoon at four), a kind of hysteria that took the form of gasping and palpitations, and seizures of depression in which he uncontrollably wept.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says confidently that all this can be explained by a recent diagnosis of Chagas's Disease, caught in Argentina. Darwin recorded the bite of the insect that could have given him the disease in his *Beagle* journal. But as Bowlby points out in an appendix, Darwin was already suffering six months before the bite from the gastrointestinal nausea and cramps characteristic of the disease.

Bowlby's thesis is that Darwin's illness was psychosomatic, traceable to the loss of his mother when he was eight. The family was stoic (Grandpa Wedgwood, the famous potter, had a whonky knee obviated by the practical solution of amputating the offending leg) and treated death and grief by paying no attention to it.

Little Charles, Bowlby thinks, was deprived of the grief his mother's death required. Darwin's attacks tended to be more severe when members of his family died, and he once wrote a comforting letter to a friend who was grieving over a death in which he says that he himself had yet to suffer the death of a loved one—an obvious suppression of any memory of his mother's death.

Fortunately, Bowlby's account of Darwin's life is so thoroughly professional that the reason he came to write it (to solve the mystery of Darwin's chronic illness) does not obtrude. Genius pays for being genius. The biographies of intensely creative people are full of awful despondencies (as in the James family, in the lives of Beethoven, Nietzsche, and Melville) as well as of crippling illnesses. There's Sir Walter Scott and Montaigne, both with excruciatingly painful kidney stones. There's Francis Parkman, whose mysterious illnesses resemble Darwin's.

And, confusingly, there are many artists who were orphaned early with no apparent harm, or who, like Brancusi, were turned out of the house to make their way in the world at age ten. It may well be that a deprivation of affection is psychologically ruinous, but it is also clearly true that prolonged and excessive parental care is smothering and has its own psychological disorders. Nature seems to be wonderfully flexible here. I have always thought it a spectacle for amusement that such exemplars of the French avant-garde in our time as Apollinaire, Cocteau, Marie Laurencin, and Sartre all had to report to their mamas well into their thirties. General Wolfe, the conqueror of French Canada, dutifully wrote to his mother a daily letter. Mencius praises an emperor who made no decisions in war or peace before he had consulted his mother.

Would Darwin's mother, had she lived to a matriarchal age, have been distressed by her son's materialistic theory in which a hazarded variation causes the success or obliteration of a species? She was a woman descended from freethinkers who had known Franklin and Jefferson. Darwin's wife, Emma, loving companion that she was (her affectionate name for Charles was Nigger, and his for her Mammy), was anxious throughout their marriage about his indif-

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ference to religion. Though Darwin lists the concept of God among the "noble" ideas which separate man from the other animals, he had no talent himself for a belief in imaginary beings.

Darwin's illness has a special interest for Bowlby. What the reader will find far more interesting is Darwin's hale and lively mind. There are many accounts of Darwin's sharp intellect; Bowlby includes ample evidence of Darwin's unfailing wit (though he failed to appreciate Sam Butler's) and the elastic jump of the man's curiosity. He was interested in practically everything. When an idea came into focus, he took it and ran with it. Between the *Origin* and *The Descent of Man*, his two masterpieces in science, there came the monumental *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*. His later life was incredibly productive: the elegant treatise on the fertilization of orchids (still the authoritative work), his book on earthworms, the neglected work on the facial expressions of emotions, the autobiography (not published whole until 1958), and many botanical studies, botany having nudged zoology to one side in his old age. There was a day in June 1864 when Darwin wrote to the botanist Joseph Hooker: "I have a sudden access of furor about climbers. Do you grow *Adlumia cirrhosa*? Could you have a seedling dug up and potted? I want it fearfully, for it is a leaf climber and therefore sacred." This from a man who was writing three books at once, raising a family of geniuses who still grace the scientific world, carrying on an international correspondence, and upchucking every day at four. (There has been a Darwin in the Royal Society since 1761.)

And therefore sacred. Several students of Darwinian discourse have noted that Darwin, Spinoza-like and probably unintentionally, evolved a faith in the natural forces he found the mechanics of. In successive editions of the *Origin*, Nature acquires a capital and a gender (female). The *Origin* and the *Descent* are an Old Testament and a New. The structure of ideas easily wears a new mask while keeping its architecture unassailable.

There is no event without a past. Once geology began to uncover the fossil record, a rational account of it was inevitable. Darwin was an orchestrator of evidence, and created a moment in knowledge when all the right questions began to find a plausible answer. The turbulence around Darwin is intellectual theater, still going strong. Not only theater, but a kind of myth—the Victorian debates between rhetorical giants, the almost instant abuse of the theory for ulterior motives, the invention of "social Darwinism" by Herbert Spencer, the Molièresque comedy in Dayton, Tennessee, the fundamentalist Creationists and flat-earthers whose real motive is to keep their hapless children from knowing about sex until the marriage night, the embarrassment of both Protestants and Catholics, the *rifiuto* of Islam.

Bowlby's final chapter in this splendid biography is a coda in which he traces the careers of Darwin's associates and detractors beyond Darwin's death. It might well have been (especially as Bowlby seems to have come upon an incandescent energy at eighty) a sketch of Darwinism as it moved outward into the world. A moment still bright in Scandinavian intellectual history was the translation of Darwin by Jens Peter Jacobsen into Danish, coming hard on Georg Brandes's lectures (the first in Europe) on Nietzsche. There was the touching drama in the United States of Louis Agassiz's rejection of the theory while his colleague at Harvard Asa Gray accepted it. Darwinism rippled through literature in a rising tide. "The survival of the fittest" lost its scientific meaning of "most advantageously adapted to an environment" and became "might makes right." Oswald Spengler thought Darwinism a mere version of British middle-class faith in Progress, unworthy of the Faustian soul.

Darwin's first great good luck was to have been born into a family whose traditions were scientific and technological. The Darwins and Wedgwoods were broadminded and generous as well as industrious. The only cant word in Bowlby's biography is "workaholic," a coinage of the Rev. W. E. Oates in 1968, a Yuppy Babu word that is used in medi-

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cal circles and that probably struck Dr. Bowlby as a nifty Americanism. Bowlby would seem to have been a workaholic, but Darwin wasn't. He was not a slave to work. He loved what he was doing, and he did it out of pure curiosity. He was not at a university, and did not lecture. His childhood had been an adventure in collecting, an activity that put him in with good minds and loyal friends. His sailing on *The Beagle* was a stroke of fate. *The Beagle* had a naturalist (he abandoned ship in a snit at the first opportunity). Darwin was along for the very British reason that the captain was a gentleman who could only associate with other gentlemen, and on a four-year scientific journey one wants company. Captain FitzRoy (Bowlby spells him correctly, and is practically alone in so doing) might have been invented by Dickens. His mind was narrow, he had not a scrap of imagination, and he was a pompous ass. Though he rose to admiral and governed New Zealand and sat on many naval boards, he was driven mad by knowing that he had harbored and dined with an atheist. While Bishop Wilberforce debated Huxley at Oxford, FitzRoy paced with a Bible before the crowd outside, shouting, "The Book! The Book!" He later slit his own throat.

Bowlby notes that Darwin was unhappy and fretful if he wasn't working. Genius finds its rest and its refuge in its work, let the psychiatrists make of this what they will. England had invented the British family, one of the most harmonious societies in the world. Servants ran it: Darwin had a Jeeves all his life, even on *The Beagle*. In his daily round Darwin had the company of a loving and congenial wife, a houseful of children and eventually grandchildren. He corresponded with every scientist in the world. The old Alexander von Humboldt came to England to meet him. It is, I suppose, mysterious that so successful a man should be a mess of hot nerves and gasping anxiety. I respect Bowlby's diagnosis: hurt children can and do carry encrypted grief to the grave. That Darwin was extraordinarily sensitive can be seen in his notebooks where, as a very young man, he was already committing himself to an uncompromising materialism. He was careful to keep his aesthetic sense alive, and to work it into his theory, where it appears as sexual attraction. All excess of this thrilling response to the giddiness of mating is the bonus which we call art. It is wonderful to think of *Die Zauberflöte* as the sublimated evolution of the booming of grouse.

What Darwin had taught himself to see was an invisible text written across nature. He read the Galapagian finches (a slightly varying kind on each of a group of islands); he read the fossil record; he brought all of creation into one grand plot of chance and adaptation. He must have known that he was changing the way every honest mind saw the world. He had no illusions, but the Victorians were a pious and idealistic people. He could not foresee how Freud would parody his theory by imagining evolutionary stages in human emotions, or how the social sciences would vulgarize it, or how it would all become a popular misconception; but he did know that he was dynamiting acres of theology and redirecting all studies of the past and of nature.

Though Darwin's easily recognized face can be found in all icons of Great Thinkers, he is not read. He was a competent writer but no stylist. *The Voyage of "The Beagle"* is readable; the notebooks are fascinating. The *Origin* and the *Descent* can be read by people who enjoy tedious arguments and copious examples. For those with a taste for such things, Darwin on the fertilization of orchids and on the earthworm is engaging reading.

The art of biography was evolved for precisely such intricate lives as Darwin's, which was lived mostly in the mind, and which has consequences and reverberations laterally in his own time and diachronically down to ours, and which far from running down is gaining momentum, attracting attention from many directions. Only now is the study of facial expressions coming into its own. Linguists are claiming Darwin as one of their pioneers. Paleontology, medicine, zoology, sociology, genetics all share a Darwinian heritage.

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If Bowlby the clinician who specialized in grief wanted to write a biography of Darwin that emphasizes the enigmatic anguish of a great mind, he has succeeded. He has also written a thoroughly good biography in which Darwin is vividly present against the background of his distinguished family and his times.

Russian classics

Charles A. Moser, editor
The Cambridge History of Russian Literature. Cambridge University Press, 686 pages, $85

reviewed by Vasily Rudich

There are many ironies in the history of Russian literature. In chronological terms alone, it is as impressive as any world literature. With a thousand-year heritage, it is almost as old as the Russian state itself. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Russian literature had produced very few works of perennial value. Indeed, what the world recognizes as great Russian literature has been in existence for no more than two hundred years: roughly as long as the United States of America.

The two indisputable Russian literary masterpieces produced before the eighteenth century—the anonymous twelfth-century heroic epic *The Lay of the Host of Igor* and the seventeenth-century autobiography of the fiery schismatic Archpriest Avvakum—exercised no influence on the literatures of Europe and remained unknown even among the neighboring Slavs. One example will dramatize the extent of the country's self-imposed cultural isolation. While Western Europe saw thirty thousand secular titles published in the fifty years following the invention of book printing by Johannes Gutenberg in 1455, only seven secular titles were printed in Russia over the course of the entire seventeenth century: two grammars, handbooks on arithmetic, geometry, artillery, and military tactics, and the Codex of the Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich. In its near total disengagement from the European intellectual mainstream, the condition of Russian culture for centuries after the collapse of Tartar rule in 1480 prefigured the Soviet "iron curtain" of recent doleful memory.

But when Russian literature did finally emerge as a cultural institution in the middle of the eighteenth century, it took only fifty years for the arrival of its first giant, Alexander Pushkin. Pushkin's genius, happily combining the national and the universal, left an indelible mark on the evolution of Russian letters, endowing it with the "world-wide sensitivity" in which Dostoevsky would later find its greatest spiritual virtue. During the next several decades, the literary scene in Russia witnessed an extraordinary outburst of creativity that soon allowed it to equal —and perhaps even to surpass—the literary accomplishments of any other European country at that time. The consummation of this development, the Russian realistic novel, rightly belongs among mankind's finest artistic achievements. In the words of a contributor to the new *Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, "once its portals have been entered [the Russian classical novel] can become so uplifting a place in which to dwell that all other literary experiences seem small-scale by comparison."

Although it has suffered under a totalitarian regime for over seventy years, Russian literature on the whole has fared surprisingly well in the twentieth century. Not only has it succeeded in maintaining standards of excellence, but it has also enriched us with new works of genius, in poetry as well as in prose. The idiosyncrasies of Russia's history have affected her literature in many subtle ways, and the ironies with which it was fraught from the very beginning continue to make themselves felt. In the absence of any institutionalized force capable of spiritual or intellectual opposition to despotic rule (the Russian Orthodox Church, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, was for centuries fully subordinate to the state), literature acquired a spiritual authority it has never enjoyed in the West.

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Furthermore, in Russia literature was (and still is) looked upon as a source not of only moral but also of social and political instruction. This public attitude has naturally tended to invest writers with a heightened sense of responsibility and of mission. It may also help to explain the ambivalent political status of literature in Russian society, where words can be both the government's powerful weapon and its deadliest enemy. No other literature has suffered so much outrage and abuse from critics of every political description or has so often served regrettably as an instrument of oppression. At the same time, no other literature has been so fearless in the face of harassment and terror or can claim so distinguished a list of martyrs, justifying the poet Maximilian Voloshin's bitter lament on the "cruel fate" inflicted by "infanticidal Russia" on the best and greatest of her gifted offspring.

From a volume as ambitious as *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, which aims to provide a "survey of Russian literature from the beginning to this decade in sufficient, but not overwhelming detail," one naturally expects elucidation of these themes and issues. One expects, moreover, that in charting Russia's literary landscape across the ages, such a volume will properly attend to every genre and present accurate information not only about authors of world fame but also about lesser-known figures whose work exhibits some feature of interest or artistic worth. At some six hundred pages (plus a lengthy bibliography), the Cambridge history promises at first sight to meet these expectations. It is crammed with facts and names, and it contains enough critical insights and apt formulations to impress the lay reader. Closer scrutiny, however, leads to a series of disappointments. Intelligent judgments alternate with clichés; information seems at times superfluous but more often insufficient and tainted by factual errors. In terms of its genral perspective, the book suffers from a common flaw of Western Slavic scholarship: it lacks an independent and comprehensive conception of Russian literature free of the biases and distortions of official Soviet literary doctrine.

It is true that much of the ideological prejudice about Russian literary matters originated long before the arrival of the Soviets, thanks to the radical critics of the previous century, especially Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848). Known to contemporaries as "Vissarion the Frenzied," Belinsky held that only those works written by authors who were socially oriented and belonged to what he called "the natural school" qualified for admission to the canon. Those who did not subscribe to his narrow concept of literary excellence—writers, for instance, who promoted the idea of "art for art's sake"—were to be abused, ridiculed, or dismissed outright. It was easy for the Soviets to appropriate Belinsky's viewpoint, vulgarize it even further, and adapt it to their own purposes. As a consequence, entire literary movements, not to speak of individual authors, have been retroactively ostracized from the body of Russian literature.

The degree and efficacy of this ostracism has varied, however, with vacillations in the party line. Some writers have been relegated to utter oblivion, withdrawn from circulation and never reprinted; others were available only to select professionals in special library departments; still others could aspire to no more than derogatory mention in textbooks. Finally, those writers whose greatness could not be denied have typically been showered with "criticism" that has obscured and misrepresented the very nature of their work, sometimes beyond recognition. Thus Tolstoy was hailed as "the mirror of the Russian revolution" and Dostoevsky was portrayed merely as an ardent champion of the dispossessed, with scant attention paid to the psychological and spiritual content of their art.

That this truncated conception of Russian literature has proved unduly influential in the West is at least partially recognized by Charles A. Moser, the editor of the new Cambridge history. In his remarks on the double standard applied to works of literature written or published within and without

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the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, Mr. Moser acknowledges that this was something that—"at least in Western scholarship—never should have occurred in the first place." But he does not extend this sober criticism to earlier periods or attempt to rectify the historical record. In fact, despite clear signs of the various authors' efforts to avoid ideological traps, the book betrays a close dependence on the tradition of one-sided criticism initiated by Belinsky. This is evident not only in the material it includes but also—and perhaps more glaringly—in the material it tends to exclude. Several dozen authors of some import can easily be listed who are either completely omitted from the discussion or do not receive their due. In this and other respects, the Cambridge history compares unfavorably with the classic history of Russian literature published in English by Prince Dmitri Sviatopolk-Mirsky (1890-1939) as early as 1927, where many authors here neglected are concisely and memorably characterized. (Incidentally, this brilliant scholar made the unwise decision to return to the Soviet Union in 1932 and shortly thereafter perished in Stalin's concentration camps.)

This is not to say that the Cambridge volume is without its virtues. In its initial chapters on the literature preceding the Golden Age of the nineteenth century, it contains much of value. These chapters, devoted to writings somewhat esoteric and unfamilar to most Western readers, are critically independent, forcefully written, and for the most part do not omit pertinent information. One curious omission—no doubt an echo of the Soviet official prudery—is the name of the eighteenth-century erotic poet Ivan Barkov. Barkov's work, which has been broadly circulated underground, certainly contributed to the development of the Russian language. He was much admired by Alexander Pushkin, who once remarked that he would not believe in the arrival of freedom of speech in Russia until Barkov's complete works were published. By this token, freedom has not yet arrived in Russia, for Barkov remains unpublished there after almost two hundred years.

Later chapters, however, rely increasingly on criteria imported from the Russian homeland. There are even men of genius whose stature is de-emphasized, including the poet Fyodor Tyutchev and the novelist Nikolai Leskov, both of whom were attacked as reactionaries by contemporary radicals. Many authors who deviated from the realistic mainstream are either omitted or marginalized. Osip Senkovsky is mentioned only as a prolific journalist: his whimsically fantastic tales under the pen-name of Baron Brambeus are ignored. Similarly, the unclassifiable Alexander Veltman—the author of numerous remarkable works and the closest Russian approximation to Laurence Sterne—is recognized only for one "most amusing and far-fetched" society novel.

Perhaps the most conspicuous omission from this book it that of the unique literary phenomenon "Kozma Prutkov" (*fl.* 1853-1863), a fictitious author and character created by the poet Alexey K. Tolstoy and his two cousins Zhemchuzhnikov. Kozma Prutkov is conceived as a graphomaniacal petty official who produces pompous, platitudinous effusions in verse and prose, blissfully convinced of his own genius. At the same time, each of his utterances conceals a satirical barb aimed at the bureaucracy and philistinism of which the egotistical and self-important "author" is presumably ignorant. Many of Kozma Prutkov's aphorisms have entered everyday Russian speech and are still popular. His hilarious "Proposal to Introduce Uniformity of Thought in Russia" used to rouse suspicion among Soviet authorities because of its uncanny resemblance to their own methods.

The Cambridge history is also marred by numerous factual errors—unconscionable in a scholarly project that claims to be authoritative. Alexander Shishkov is called Alexey (page 93); Aleksander Turgenev is confused with his brother Andrey, dead by that time (page 129). Even English literature suffers: we read that Mikhail Lermontov's unfinished tale *Vadim* reveals an acquaintance with Walter Scott's *The Black Monk*—instead of *The Black Dwarf* (page 185). Very little is

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said of popular genres, like the nineteenth-century historical novel, and what is said is mistaken: it is not true that Pushkin criticized Mikhail Zagoskin "for his unjust depiction of the poet Trediakovsky as a sycophant and talentless fool" (page 158). Two novels of two different novelists are confused: Zagoskin's *Yury Miloslavsky, or the Russians in 1612* (incidentally, the first Russian historical novel) and Ivan Lazhechnikov's *The Ice Palace*, which deals with the events of the middle eighteenth century when Vasily Trediakovsky lived. But it was Lazhechnikov and not Zagoskin who provoked Pushkin's criticism. All such errors and omissions are particularly unfortunate in light of the greater attention lavished on many epigones of the "natural" and realistic schools who are now rarely remembered even by the experts.

Still, it would be unfair not to mention that the Cambridge history offers some important insights. For instance, it correctly suggests that the teleological impulse of the great Russian realistic novels—implying as it does the possibility of moral improvement—"seems to offer a philosophical challenge to the materialist view." The central chapters also contain some sparkling characterizations and felicitous judgments. Thus Dostoevsky's life is described as "a magnificent nineteenth-century Calvary leading to the very gates of Paradise," and Pushkin's lyrical verse is likened to "a crystal goblet, elegant, symmetrical, and transparent, which gives forth a clear and resonant sound when struck." Isaac Babel's prose is astutely contrasted with Marc Chagall's paintings and Sergey Prokofiev's music; socialist-realist fiction is explained away as "an exercise in mutual deception on the part of everyone involved"; the writer Yuri Trifonov, a man with a tormented soul, is called "the closest approximation to a repentant aristocrat the Soviet Union has known." Nevertheless, especially in the sections dealing with the twentieth century, the book's numerous errors and omissions cannot offset such occasional flashes of insight.

As we approach the end of the century, it is natural to wonder which works from our period's immense literary production are destined to endure. While it is too early to attempt any definitive answer, with respect to Russian literature it is already clear that the vast bulk of the writing celebrated by Soviet officialdom is destined for the dustbin of history. Some of these writings certainly deserve mention as period pieces, but not to the detriment of names and works that stand out as wholesome, original, or sublime. And here the Cambridge history falls egregiously short in failing to do justice to several works now recognized as masterpieces. While the book treats socialist realism and the so-called "production novel" at considerable length, it fails to give any mention whatsoever to Anna Akhmatova's mature poetry, including several famous lyrical cycles, the poignant *Requiem*—a powerful denunciation of Stalinism written in Stalin's lifetime—and the great narrative *Poem Without a Hero*, a work comparable, as a testament of our age, to the poems of T. S. Eliot and Saint-John Perse.

Nor is due recognition given to Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, arguably the best twentieth-century Russian novel. Bulgakov's novel has become a part of the idiom in the Soviet Union and is considered a modern classic in Europe. (The book is much less appreciated in the United States, where it exists in Mirra Ginsburg's excellent translation; to my mind, this betrays a lack of imaginative empathy on the part of the American audience.) Among other important works that the Cambridge history slights is Vasily Grossman's panoramic World War II novel *Life and Fate*. Mikhail Suslov, the *éminence grise* of Soviet ideology, arrogantly decreed in the 1950s that the book would wait two hundred years for publication. But when recently published in France it sold over 130,000 copies; the American edition was passed over almost unnoticed.

Despite the editor's pledge to the contrary, the Cambridge history devotes uneven attention to Soviet literature and the literature of the Russian diaspora. Entire regions of emigration are missing from the volume's literary map. For example, Russian China (particularly, Harbin), where more than two

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hundred Russian periodicals have been published, is left out of account. Of Harbin's two most distinguished poets, Arseny Nesmelov was captured by the Soviets and died at their hands, and Valery Pereleshin now resides in Brazil where he recently published a volume of verse written in Portuguese. About writers belonging to the second wave of emigration, which took place in the aftermath of World War II, we read nothing but a string of names; about those belonging to the third wave, we hear of no poet except Joseph Brodsky.

As for literary developments within the Soviet Union, it is the same story again. We encounter lavish praise of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's "outgoing and generous personality" and Andrey Voznesensky's "virtuoso technical effects." Both are familiar spokesmen in the West for the Soviet point of view, but as poets and as citizens they are far inferior to many contemporaries. For example, Aleksandr Kushner, leader of the "Leningrad school" of neo-acmeists, is perhaps the finest poet now living in Russia; in the new Cambridge history he is never mentioned.

The advent of *perestroika* has signified, among other things, a cultural upheaval on an unprecedented scale. If it is true that, during Khrushchev's "thaw" in the 1950s and early 1960s, society underwent "the return of the repressed," today we may speak of an explosion of the censored cultural past. At the present moment in Russia an army of publishers, scholars, and critics are busy rescuing and redeeming prose and poetry forgotten for at least a century and a half as well as work from the turn of the century and the early post-revolutionary years.

In the same upsurge of interest and fascination, the Soviet reader now has started to appreciate the works of Osip Senkovsky and Alexander Veltman along with those of Arseny Nesmelov, Valery Pereleshin, and the multitude of others whom the contributors to the new Cambridge volume deemed unfit to be included in their discussion. A number of stunning, previously unknown authors and literary texts are being unearthed from private and public archives, including those of the KGB. These recent discoveries have acquainted us with such new names as Daniil Andreyev, a mystic visionary of the stature of William Blake, and Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, a short-story writer who has been called by one critic "Borges-before-Borges."

One hopes that all this material will soon become the joint property of Russian and Western readers. But when that happens, we will encounter the ultimate irony of *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*—to be outdated just as it has actually entered scholarly circulation.

Capacities for invention

Jeffrey Meyers Joseph Conrad: A Biography. Scribner's, 428 pages, $27.50

reviewed by Julian Symons

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) is a perfect example of the artist who spends the first part of his life in action and adventure, the rest in writing about it. His achievements in both were remarkable. Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski left his native Poland for a life at sea when he was seventeen. He came to England for the first time at the age of twenty with only a few words of the language, but eight years later passed an examination for ship's master. Jeffrey Meyers's biography quotes some typical questions for the chief mate's and master's examinations which make clear the special difficulties they posed for somebody whose native language was not English ("You foul another ship as you are getting under weigh, and carry away your boomkin and cat-head flush with the bows:—how will you secure the anchor for sea, and work the foresail?"). But the ability to pass such difficult examinations was not matched by similar success at sea. In twenty years at sea he worked on eighteen ships, quarreled with several captains, cast himself as it seems deliberately in the role of romantic outsider.

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A poem written by his father, Apollo, to celebrate his son's christening began: "Bless you, my little son: / Be a *Pole!*" And a Pole Conrad remained, through the two decades at sea and another three living in England, first as a poor writer, eventually as a famous and successful one. He lived in England, even loved the country in a way, but never understood English habits and attitudes nor fully mastered the language. He transposed "v" and "w" so that "vowel" became "wowvel," said "ooterly" for "utterly," "trine" for "train," and "grite" for "great," found it hard to avoid pronouncing the last vowel in words like "these" and "those," and had an accent so thick that his speech was at times almost unintelligible.

Most of the reminiscences we have of Conrad come, naturally enough, from the years after he had left the sea and was living in what he thought of as the style of an English gentleman. He was seen by some as impressive, by others as ridiculous. Artists who drew, painted, and sculpted him, including Jacob Epstein, William Rothenstein, and Jo Davidson, praised the fine massive head, broad shoulders, deep velvety eyes. A magazine editor he visited, however, saw an undersized man in an overcoat that fell far below his knees and a ridiculous pot derby hat, his gestures those of "the conventional stage Hebrew," while H. G. Wells thought his gestures "very Oriental indeed." Most of the contradictions that abounded in Conrad's personality had their origins in the love he felt for the memory of his father, a passionately patriotic member of the Polish minor landed gentry who pursued an increasingly unsuccessful career as a writer of plays and poems and translator of Victor Hugo and Shakespeare. Conrad inherited not only his father's love for Poland (a distant love in his case, although he visited the country in July 1914, and was caught there by the outbreak of war) but a permanent hatred for the Russian empire that had swallowed his country.

Conrad's character as an outsider, a Pole proud of a country that did not exist, a would-be English gentleman who lacked the right manners, style, and language, was accentuated by his marriage to Jessie George, a typist sixteen years his junior whose father had been a warehouseman. He elevated her to his aristocratic level, as it were, by marriage, and did not permit criticism of her by others. Yet she was still a working-class inferior, her role that of housekeeper and secretary, so that on the wedding night she found herself writing envelopes and sticking on stamps for the formal, grandiloquent letters he wrote announcing the marriage to people who were no more than names to her.

When the self-exiled Pole turned to literature, his literary contemporaries were bowled over by his technical knowledge of sailing ships and his familiarity with places in the Far East most of them had barely heard of let alone visited. They were also dazzled by the fervor with which he wrote of them. There was, indeed still is, a general view that Conrad was a great stylist. Yet although he came in the end to use a remarkably wide vocabulary, and to write many passages that have a carefully cultivated charm, others have the awkwardness one would expect from a writer apt to say *thesa* and *thosa*, and inevitably to add such extra syllables in his mind when putting down words on the page. His use of words is occasionally awkward or wrong, as when he remarked in relation to World War I that when he heard of the murder at Sarajevo "the impression was mediocre," because the Balkan troubles had "wearied out one's attention." The times when Conrad's high romanticism dips disastrously into sentimentality may be represented by a brief passage, one of many such in the novels, from *Victory*:

> All her soul was wrapped in her passionate determination, in an exalted belief in herself —in the contemplation of her amazing opportunity to win the certitude, the eternity, of that man's love.

Conrad's occasional failures as a novelist sprang from the gap between his intentions and the means he used to achieve them, the bones of the plot. The intentions were

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almost always to show choices between heroic and cowardly or degrading moral choices, but the means were often those of sensational literature. Many of the novels are straightforward sea stories given a layer of moral dressing (*Lord Jim*, *Typhoon*, *The Shadow-Line*, *Victory*), or made ambiguous by the use of a Marlovian narrator or shifts of viewpoint within the story. The material is given more moral weight than it is able to bear. The masterpieces are the books where the sensational material is fused with the plot and kept under control—*The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, *Nostromo*, some of the short stories. All are fired by Conrad's hatred of democracy and the grand abstractions among which his mind habitually moved, *Under Western Eyes* by his respect for his father's hopeless support of Polish independence.

Readers of Jeffrey Meyers's other biographies will know he is not a man to be deterred by volumes already published about Conrad's life, especially the books by Frederick Karl, Zdzislaw Najder, and Norman Sherry that make the shelf groan under their weight. They will know also what to expect: a straight-from-the-shoulder no-nonsense approach, the ground covered with speed and apparent comprehensiveness, probably a listing of significant illnesses with comments on them, consideration of one or two works in detail including something comparatively neglected, and almost always some discoveries triumphantly announced. Sometimes the approach works well. In his Hemingway biography the concentration on family illnesses seemed to give new insight into the writer's life and character, the recent study of D. H. Lawrence gave the best account of his battles with Frieda and offered illuminating new material about the early Nottingham years. Alas, his book on Conrad is Meyers at his least convincing.

The bulk of the book is a straightforward retelling of the life, stronger on the seafaring years than on Conrad the literary man. The relationship between Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) is inadequate, minimizing Conrad's considerable debt to Ford both in relation to his prose style and to the technique of indirection developed in part through discussion with Ford, although also in part from the example of Henry James. It was from Ford that Conrad learned what Ford called the "unaltering rule for the rendering of conversations . . . that no speech of one character should ever answer the speech that goes before it," but you would hardly know it from this account. Again, there is nothing positively wrong about a chapter like "Literary Friendships and Artistic Breakthrough," but the title itself conveys the briskness with which Meyers goes through this and other familiar stuff, eager to get to the new material he claims to have discovered.

Some of this is interesting but of minor importance, like the questions asked on Conrad's three merchant-marine examinations; other discoveries are mere curiosities, like a film scenario about a South American revolution Conrad wrote in collaboration with his agent, James B. Pinker; but the biographer places most emphasis on his revelations about Conrad's "love affair in 1916 with the wild and beautiful American journalist Jane Anderson." There is also a "discovery" of a literary-critical kind in the lengthy speculations about the novel *Victory*.

The "love affair" with Jane Anderson gets a chapter which is testimony only to Meyers's capacity for blowing up unimportant incidents into something found by him deeply significant. The known facts are that Conrad met what Meyers calls this "Georgia peach" of a roaming journalist in April 1916, found her attractive, wrote letters to her and flirted with her, to the eventual annoyance of his wife, Jessie. There is no fragment of proof for the suggestion made here that Jane Anderson became Conrad's mistress in the summer of 1916 ("Conrad went to her flat for tea, stayed for dinner and possibly consummated their affair") or that he wrote her "passionate love letters." Nor is it true that she has been "ignored or neglected" by other biographers. Karl and Najder deal with her relationship to Conrad perfectly adequately in a

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very few pages, and stress that it is a matter of pure speculation whether she briefly became his mistress. Meyers, on the other hand, has become so fascinated by her that he gives us an appendix on her "later life," which included broadcasting Nazi propaganda from Berlin during World War II.

The comments about *Victory*, which is called Conrad's "most misunderstood, underrated and controversial novel," show the perverse zest with which Meyers pursues unlikely psychological interpretations of fiction. *Victory* is generally and rightly agreed to be one of Conrad's weakest works. This "island tale" is about the attempt of Heyst, a Conradian man of remote immaculate virtue, to save himself and "a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy" (i.e., from a traveling concert party) from the murderous intentions of a languid English "gentleman" called only Mr. Jones, his vicious sidekick, Ricardo, and a sort of primitive man-monster named Pedro. The style is not always as windily rhetorical as in the passage already quoted, although Heyst is often moved at the sight of the fiddle-scraping Lena to remarks like "What an impenetrable girl you are, Lena, with those grey eyes of yours," but the book's organization is deeply confused, including as it does a narrator who seems to have no place in the story, and the assorted forces of evil are equally inept and improbable. As sometimes happens in Conrad's poorer works, high intentions are negated by superficial or absurd characterization.

This adventure story, which at points bears a resemblance to Stevenson's and Lloyd Osbourne's *The Ebb-Tide*, is seen by Meyers as a "deliberate compromise between Conrad's desire to write openly about homosexuality and his need to suppress the theme." Mr. Jones is thin, with "delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows," and greatly dislikes women. One can accept that we are meant to understand he has homosexual tendencies, although he seems rather more like a Nineties aesthete turned nasty. In any case Conrad, writing just before World War I, merely sketches in Mr. Jones as a decadent, listless member of the English upper class. It is by a true flight of the imagination that Meyers sees Ricardo, called by Jones his secretary, as "Jones's paid lover." A flight of imagination because there is no hint of this in the text. There is not an affectionate word spoken between the two men, their relationship being that of arrogant master and fawning, admiring servant. Ricardo is not physically attractive, a muscular short thug with a pockmarked face and a thin disheveled moustache "sticking out quaintly under the tip of a rigid nose."

Moreover, Ricardo tries to rape Lena, who according to Meyers is "upset by her lack of sexual relations with Heyst, who once tried to sleep with her but was unable to do so." Again, the text does not begin to justify such a statement. When Lena asks Heyst "What more do you want from me?" and he replies "the impossible, I suppose," Meyers regards this as a confession of impotence, when he should know Conrad would never proceed so crudely. Indeed, the following discussion between the two makes it clear that what Heyst "wants" is something impalpable, not mere physical possession. The analysis ends with Meyers triumphant:

> Though Ricardo's violent lust for Lena is an ironic reflection of Heyst's sexual failure, he achieves orgasm with Lena in a fashion that is as bizarre as his relations with Jones. All three men . . . share a common misogyny, which is manifested in Heyst's impotence, Jones's homosexuality and Ricardo's exhibitionism, voyeurism and fetishism.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the text gives no support to the statement that Ricardo achieves orgasm with Lena. What can one do but stand back and admire such a capacity for invention?

Altogether, a deplorable book. In any case what is needed at this moment in relation to Conrad is not another biography, but a study of the ways in which his brilliant and extravagant use, and occasional misuse, of the English language contributed to the effects

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of the half-dozen works bearing his name that retain their power to move, enlighten, and disturb us.

Love on the couch

Jonathan Lear Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 243 pages, $18.95

reviewed by Jenny Teichman

Somewhat paradoxically, many people consider philosophy both very difficult yet at the same time eminently accessible—something you can parachute into, either from other academic disciplines or from no discipline: from science and drama and history of ideas, or from banking, big business, and bus-driving.

Quite a few professors, in various disciplines, display a craving to be allowed to wear the label "philosopher." When a teacher of literature, or history, or whatever, parachutes into philosophy or one of its borderlands, the first thing he tries to do is move the boundaries and change the shape of the territory. If you suggest to him that his latest book is not strictly speaking philosophy as traditionally understood, but rather literary criticism (say) as traditionally understood, he will scream with rage and rush around yelling about the wickedness of "artificial academic boundaries." You never get this reaction if you say that some book should be labeled economics rather than political theory, or mathematics rather than physics. Conversely, anyone parachuting out of philosophy is likely to want to carry some of its prestige into his new territory. For it seems that to describe writers, or theories, or topics as *philosophical* is to endow them with considerable prestige. I suspect that the reasons are etymological (and therefore superstitious).

Jonathan Lear, the author of *Love and Its Place in Nature*, looks at first sight to be parachuting out of philosophy into psychoanalytic theory. While it appears from the jacket blurb that Lear is himself undergoing psychoanalysis, he is not a professional analyst but a professor of philosophy at Yale University.

I think it worth noting that Professor Lear is a boundary-blurrer. For instance, on page 183 he writes that "it is only because psychoanalysis was founded in the treatment of illness and philosophy tends to focus on health that they look like different disciplines." By parallel argument you can easily show that psychoanalysis is the same thing as I.Q. testing or weightlifting. Professor Lear continues: "As psychoanalysis and philosophy turn their attention to the growth and development of the individual, their boundaries should fade." We see in these comments an excellent example of boundary-moving carried out for the purpose of endowing a somewhat problematic discipline—in this case psychoanalysis, the place parachuted into—with the prestige of the place parachuted out of: namely, philosophy. (The passage quoted also fails to take account of the long history of child analysis, which is concerned precisely with the study of "the growth and development of the individual." But that is by-the-by.)

On closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear that Professor Lear isn't merely parachuting, he is doing philosophy of psychoanalysis, which is a species of philosophy of science. Let's compare Professor Lear's field with another example of philosophy of science, philosophy of physics. Psychoanalysis has believers, atheists, and agnostics. This is not the case with quantum physics, where the layman mostly takes what the scientist says on trust. Philosophy of physics may claim to detect, and to iron out, contradictions in physics, but it does not actually castigate that branch of learning as a fraud. But a considerable number of positivistic philosophers—including Wittgenstein, Cioffi, Scriven, Grunbaum—have so castigated psychoanalysis.

Now, should a philosopher of psychoanalysis write only for believers? Or should he take note of the attacks of castigators and the

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doubts of agnostics? After all, when it comes to psychoanalysis there are lots of agnostics around. As it happens, Professor Lear writes only for believers; yet recollect that respectable philosophers of physics also write only for *their* believers. If you are an agnostic this book might persuade you that psychoanalysis is a science—or, again, that it is not. If you are an atheist, then you will classify it as belonging to the same genre as philosophy of astrology or philosophy of alchemy.

By "psychoanalysis" Professor Lear means Freudian and neo-Freudian theory. He does not mention Adler, or Jung, or Otto Rank. His stated aim is to place Freudian psychoanalysis on the couch and psychoanalyze it. He wants to see how its self-contradictions (its "internal conflicts") can be resolved, how its thematic structure can be improved, and how what he takes to be its main discoveries can be developed. His method is to examine a number of Freud's writings in roughly chronological order, selecting passages here and there for interpretation and extrapolation. On the whole he does not claim to be finding out what Freud really meant, but rather to be seeing how Freud's theory might be enlarged and modified and made stronger. He wants to help psychoanalysis, as analysts help their human patients. He wants to help it to live.

When Professor Lear speaks of Freud's most significant discoveries he does not mean those that are usually regarded as such. Freud's most significant discoveries, on Professor Lear's understanding, are "a science of subjectivity; the discovery of an archaic form of mental functioning; the positing of Love as a basic force in nature." This of course would not have been Freud's own list. He said that his most important discoveries were the unconscious mind, infant sexuality (or, as he sometimes called it, "the polymorphous perversity of the child"), and the Oedipus complex. Moreover, it is not too easy to find the items in Professor Lear's list anywhere at all in Freud's writings unless you are prepared to read between the lines.

Consider the idea of a science of subjectivity. Professor Lear is right to say that Freud needed to develop a science of subjectivity; but it is less obvious that he is right when he implies that Freud not only perceived the need but actually did something about it. The best account of the possibility of, and the need for, a science of subjectivity is not to be found in the writings of Freud, who (I believe) scarcely mentions such a thing, but in Thomas Nagel's recent book *The View from Nowhere*. The considerations adduced by Nagel are philosophical. What is more, they are surely powerful enough to influence not only believers but atheists and agnostics as well. (It's a pity Professor Lear doesn't list this work in his bibliography.)

Now let's look at the idea of archaic mind, which must be distinguished, of course, from unconscious mind. Professor Lear writes that Freud discovered "an archaic form of mental functioning." This ambiguous expression might suggest to some readers that the concept of archaic mind was unknown before Freud thought of it. Any such inference would be a mistake, because in fact the concept of archaic mind does not come to us from Freud. It can be best described as neo-Lamarckian in origin, and it was part of the stock in trade of nineteenth-century biology and psychology. Later, as is well known, the whole idea of archaic mind became a source of contention between Freud and Jung.

Professor Lear is not completely consistent in his use of the term "archaic mind." Thus on page 9 he writes "What we call an unconscious thought tends to be a conscious, conceptualized judgment that stands in a developmental relationship to a more archaic preconceptualized form of mental activity," implying that archaic mind properly speaking is prelinguistic. But on page 191 we find him asserting that "to say a priori that [people] *cannot possibly* be accepting sentences that express contradictions, is, in effect, to refuse to recognize archaic mental life for what it is: active mind," implying that archaic mind thinks in sentences, albeit self-contradictory ones. Still, this is only a small muddle, one that would be easy to mend.

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However things may be with psychoanalytic theory, archaic mind could be a useful idea in philosophy. For instance, it might be able to fill a conceptual gap in our understanding of language. Consider the question of learning a language. There are no languages which could be used to teach children their mother tongues. Children move from a mental state in which they possess no syntax and no semantics into a state in which they can only think syntactically and semantically. But how can this be? Wittgenstein suggests that children are trained, not taught, to use their first bits of language, and he compares this process with the process of training a dog to fetch a stick. Most dogs respond to such training, and thus acquire the syntax of stick-fetching. But no cat will respond. Dogs and cats have different kinds of archaic mind.

The most important of Professor Lear's three main ideas is the idea of Love (his capital letter). He explains that he substitutes the word "Love" for the more familiar "Eros" in order to avoid "muffling the intensity of Freud's thought." There follows a complex discussion (Chapter 5) about the true nature of sexuality, the implied outcome of which appears to be that the Freudian emphasis on sexuality is either a mirage or a mistake or both. Either Freud was really talking about Love all along, or else he ought to have been.

I believe it was Freud and not his translators who was responsible for the word "Eros." Presumably he intended a nuance. Now, nuancing isn't the same thing as muffling. And it is difficult to escape the suspicion that Freud would have classed Professor Lear himself as a muffler, as just one more of those quasi-Freudians and ex-Freudians who keep trimming away the emphasis on sexuality in order to turn psychoanalysis into a more respectable calling. For what is Love? Well, whatever it is it sounds a lot sweeter and nicer than sex. Freud may well have been right about the motives of his colleagues even if he was wrong about the nature of the life force. In any event, I think it must be concluded that Professor Lear's theory about Love is his own. There is no way you can easily extract it from Freud.

Professor Lear says that Love is the driving force of nature. That is not too implausible if inanimate objects and the lower animals are excluded from nature. On page 140 he makes the much more startling claim that "The world exists because we love it," adding that "it is not at all clear how to understand [this statement]." Nor is it very easy to understand how he came to it in the first place. It seems to me that he arrived there by leaping across several logical chasms, rather like a little mountain goat. As I understand it—if I do understand it—the leaps of reason proceed roughly as follows: On the favored interpretation, Freudianism teaches that the human world-view is infused with Love. We cannot escape from our world-view to find out what, if anything, is beyond. So for all we know the way we see the world *could* be the way the world really is. So the way we see the world *is* the way the world really is. So the world really *is* infused with Love. So the world exists because we Love it.

In a way, Professor Lear says about Love what Kant said about time—namely, that it is a condition of our perception and understanding of the world. But then Professor Lear goes even further. Since time and Love are very different, we can ask whether Love is a suitable subject for transcendental philosophy. Time is mysterious to start with. It induces a craving for explanation, and Kant does provide an explanation (well, maybe). Love, on the other hand, is a fact of human life. It comes in different styles, and while it can be problematic in practice, it does not strike most people as *theoretically* mystifying. When it comes to theoretical mystification, Love is not in the same league as Space and Time (let alone Spacetime). Professor Lear actually succeeds in making Love seem more mysterious than it is: in fact, I find it hard to understand what he can mean by the word. Perhaps this doesn't matter.

Professor Lear believes that human beings share a fundamental world-view, in which the world is somehow infused with Love. Many, perhaps most, analysts would share the first part of that belief. In my opinion,

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though, belief in a universal world-view is a manifestation of what Wittgenstein called "the craving for generality," a craving which he said "leads the philosopher into complete darkness." Of course Wittgenstein wasn't infallible. But at least he allowed for variety.

Moreover, if there really was such a thing as a universal world-view wouldn't human beings find each other easy to understand? Yet nations do not understand one another; children often find adult behavior inexplicable; and it is notorious that many men say they find women incomprehensible. Freud was such a man. He wrote that "The great question . . . which I have not been able to answer despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'" Finally, ordinary observation indicates that for many individuals the world is infused not by Love but by hate —self-hate, class hate, sexual hate, hatred of ideas, and the mindless cruel hatred that suffuses the brains of torturers.

In the early part of his career Freud produced some not bad arguments defending the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. (Because he is writing for believers, Professor Lear doesn't mention any of these.) For instance, Freud produced rational arguments in favor of accepting the reality of the unconscious mind, first in the (original) *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, and then in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Unfortunately his later accounts, both of the infrastructure and the details of psychoanalytic theory, are less compelling. They generally refer to inaccessible episodes, and usually start with some such phrase as "I have discovered in the course of my analytic practice that . . ." He might as well have added "so take it or leave it."

I believe that Professor Lear's attempt to psychoanalyze psychoanalysis and his huge devotion to it are in conflict. The project of helping psychoanalysis by psychoanalyzing it cannot dodge the various philosophical questions about its rationale any more than the psychoanalysis of human patients can ignore their prevarications and rationalizations. As I have just noted, Freud did not dodge the first questions raised about the reality of the unconscious mind. Nowadays the idea of a science of subjectivity might be used to answer positivistic attacks, but Professor Lear does not construct an answer, he merely gestures at its possibility.

Psychoanalysis is not supposed to be a wholly painless process. Neither Freud nor his followers tried to make it painless. Professor Lear, however, tries to make things easy and is surely much too kindly to the patient. In fact from time to time he can be embarrassing, as when he describes his book as itself "a work of Love." I feel sure that falling in Love with the patient is forbidden by the psychoanalytic ethic.

We do indeed need the general concepts of archaic mind and unconscious mind. But Freudian (and Jungian, Kleinian, etc.) speculation about the contents of such minds has so far yielded nothing very certain. Professor Lear's new speculations do not yield anything very certain either. Maybe the infant thinks (archaically) that it is eating its mother and becoming its mother. Then again, maybe it doesn't. Maybe instead it thinks about good breasts and bad breasts, or about its death wish, or its birth trauma, or its Archetypes, or Love. Agnostics find the speculations unconvincing. I do not think that this book will convince them, because it merely adds more speculation to the heap. But convincing agnostics was not the purpose for which it was written.

The Polish particulars

Stanislaw Baranczak Breathing Under Water & Other East European Essays. Harvard University Press, 258 pages, $22.50

reviewed by Richard Lourie

I discovered Polish literature quite by accident. Arriving in Berkeley in 1960 to pursue a degree in Russian, I was told that I would be required to learn a second Slavic language,

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literature, history. I chose Polish because I was drawn by the magnetism of Professor Czeslaw Milosz, known in the U.S. at the time only as the author of *The Captive Mind*. Though there were several émigré poets teaching various East European literatures, Milosz was the most attractive, always scowling or exuberant; his eyebrows were especially wonderful, like the tails of startled foxes. He proved an ideal mentor. Aside from teaching me Polish literature, he instilled in me a respect for translation, a craft he himself has never ceased to practice. Since I had early on made the decision to live by my pen, I ended up translating a good many books, two of which are reviewed in *Breathing Under Water*.

Though the preceding paragraph may appear personal to an almost unseemly degree, it is all in fact by way of praise for Stanislaw Baranczak. No one reads a book more slowly and more carefully than a translator. And, at the end, no one is more heartily sick of that book, with the possible exception of the author. And many of the other books Baranczak discusses were the very ones I read again and again for various tests in college. That he could sustain my interest is an achievement and that he could delight me a marvel.

Holding a temporary post at Harvard, Baranczak found himself frozen out of Poland by martial law in 1981 and has been at Harvard ever since (not the worst luck). One responsibility exiles or émigrés traditionally assume is that of explaining their culture to the host country. This is both a moral mission and, one suspects, a way to keep one's psychic footing. But explaining Poland is as devilishly difficult as the language (my first phrase was: "*Ciesze sie ze wreszcie przyjechalem*"—"I'm glad I finally arrived"). There are two reasons for that difficulty. One, Poland's history is exceedingly tangled and largely unknown, especially in America. Two, Poland's literature is a literature of poetry, the wine that travels least well. The Polish novel is best when it is an eccentric variation on the novel (in the nineteenth-century sense of the word), as in the works of Konwicki and Gombrowicz, which Baranczak discusses. (The Polish novels that are most like novels are the least worth reading.) One exact measure of his success in these essays and book reviews is that he renders the opaque clear through rigorously precise statement enlivened with a playful mirth.

A second task that Baranczak has assumed is mapping the no-man's land between cultures, one that, paradoxically, is located exactly at the point where cultures overlap. He does this well in his review of *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman's sensitive and intelligent evocation of passing from one language to another, Polish to English. But he puts the same subject to better effect in his personal essay "E. E.: The Extraterritorial" (E. E. stands for East European). There he provides a calibrated description of exile's shock to the senses, the mind, the spirit:

> . . . the size of everything. Besides being gaudier, the components of American reality are also bigger. I don't mean the obvious things like skyscrapers, cars, the Grand Canyon, or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. But even the gulls at the beach seem to be somewhat oversized here, as if they had been fed all their lives with some especially nutritious gull food, sold in easy-to-open cans.

Of course, the "E. E." in the title is designed to play off America's pop-culture consciousness, echoing E. T. with a friendly smile not devoid of irony. Baranczak not only knows our culture, he has written these essays in English, though he does require the help of editors whom he thanks for "many hours polishing (or, if I may allow myself a bad pun, un-Polishing) my immigrant's English."

The use of such devices is not only to explicate the bittersweet strangeness of exile, but to bridge cultures, as is the case in the piece called "'The Godfather,' Part III, Polish Subtitles." There Baranczak concocts a hilarious scenario: President Reagan decides to crack down on the National Actors' Guild, which is currently meeting to confer on "How to Save American Culture and Not Lose Money

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at the Same Time." All the important actors from Gregory Peck to Eddie Murphy are arrested and interned in special camps in North Dakota. "Ed Asner does his best to protest." The old Guild is dissolved and a new one formed, composed of actors "none of whom has any more acting talent than Pia Zadora." Absurd? Of course. But, insists Baranczak, not a whit less absurd when all this happened in reality to the Polish Writers' Union: He is irritated by the West's too ready acceptance of absurd events in the East of Europe, as if every sane person there did not wish a non-absurd life. (In passing, I should say that I cannot help but admire Baranczak's knowing American culture, its lingo, its levities, well enough to sense exactly what degree of snort or chuckle a reference to Pia Zadora would elicit.)

Though Baranczak prefers the self-deprecating mode, he can be dangerous. He politely dismantles several books and hands what little's left back to the author. But he can also admire and defend; that is, he has the true critic's full emotional range. Naturally, Baranczak is at his best in explicating Polish literature; he is able, for instance, to catch the very essence of Czeslaw Milosz in two words, "ecstatic pessimist." He is also adept at one of the many fine skills that go into making a good review, that of judicious citation. His piece on Witold Gombrowicz snaps and crackles with quotes from the master. First there is what Baranczak calls Gombrowicz's "brazen maxim": "Writing is nothing more than a battle that the artist wages with others for his own prominence." Then there is Gombrowicz on why he is not an Existentialist: "It seems impossible to meet the demands of *Dasein* and simultaneously have coffee and croissants. . . . To fear nothingness, but to fear the dentist more. To be consciousness, which walks around in pants and talks on the telephone . . ." This is all part of Baranczak's purposefully foredoomed efforts to place Gombrowicz in one philosophical school or another. Having dispensed with Gombrowicz and Existentialism, Baranczak comes to Gombrowicz and Marxism:

> What matters for Gombrowicz is the question of intellectual honesty, of which Marxism is totally devoid. As a philosophy which claims to relentlessly unmask and demystify everything, its ultimate proof of honesty would be an attempt to unmask itself as well. This is, however, exactly what Marxism slyly avoids by refusing to apply its formidable dialectical apparatus of demystification to its own dialectic.

I get an immediate headache merely by imagining how this novel critique of the nature of Marxism would have fared in other hands.

Baranczak's mind likes to make odd connections, ones that usually prove both edifying and amusing. In a piece entitled "Science Friction," on the Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem, he writes: "Q: What puts Stanislaw Lem in a category with François Rabelais and Anton Chekhov? A: All three started out in the medical profession." (A native-born American would probably have included William Carlos Williams.) Another such odd leap of mind, and a more telling one, is this:

> Two of the world's most powerful men were once actors. But only one of them was smart enough to write his own lines. The appearance in English of *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater* reminds us that before he became John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla's extraecclesiastic pastimes included not only philosophy, poetry, acting, skiing, and hiking but also playwriting. To paraphrase Stalin, how many diversions does the pope have?

Here, of course, the in-joke belongs to the arcane lore of Staliniana.

Versed as he is in the mysteries of the East, Baranczak admits to having been caught napping like everyone else by the recent events in his neck of the woods: ". . . a million people forming a human chain in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to demand independence for their Soviet-annexed countries . . . Andrei Sakharov serving as a parliamentary deputy . . . the election of a Solidarity activist as prime minister and the formation of Poland's

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first non-Communist government since World War Two . . ."

But then again why shouldn't he have been caught by surprise? No Nostradamus foretold the miraculous alchemy of blood becoming champagne on the Berlin Wall. Life proved greater than our imagination once again. Still, the writer's task is to keep himself and his readers alive to the intricacy and sheer magnitude of reality, which ultimately renders it a mystery to which the proper response, as Milosz always insisted, is amazement. The best of literature is thus amazement codified in a design of particulars. Stanislaw Baranczak is fluent at deciphering the Polish particulars. His essays are a welcome addition to our knowledge, and our language. I'm very glad he finally arrived.

Shorter notices

D. J. R. Bruckner Frederic Goudy. Abrams, 114 pages, $39.95

The designing of a new printing type usually takes many months because the designer needs time for reflection and revision. That was not Frederic Goudy's way. In 1927 alone he had six different typefaces in hand, and a few years later he produced the letter drawings, patterns, and matrices for an urgent commission in just one week.

That extraordinary rate of production, with its predictable effect on the quality of his designs, was one reason for the criticisms that were expressed about him in his lifetime. But the criticism did not prevail against his great popularity and reputation. Joseph Blumenthal wrote in *The Printed Book in America* that Goudy "was the only typographic designer whose fame reached beyond professional circles, sparked no doubt by his reputation as the 'mostest.'" Goudy lectured widely and frequently, and he clearly enjoyed the lionizing and the honors that accumulated. A *New Yorker* profile in 1933 was titled "Goudy: Glorifier of the Alphabet." In speeches and articles on letter design and printing he expounded the virtues of traditional style and reticence in the designer —though his need to make his hundred or so typefaces distinguishable from one another meant that as to reticence Goudy the designer took little notice of Goudy the writer.

D. J. R. Bruckner, a writer and editor for *The New York Times Book Review*, provides an interesting account of Goudy's life, which began in 1865 in Bloomington, Illinois. He describes Goudy's various jobs in and around Chicago, until he found a growing interest and ability in lettering; his setting up as a printer and his awareness of typefaces as *designed* objects; and the creation, in 1896, of his first type, for which he received ten dollars. It was a long life (he died in 1947) and an energetic one, with a move to the east in 1903, the book designing for The Village Press, in which his wife was an active force, and the designing and making of type. Goudy was unusual in acquiring engraving and foundry machinery to make type to sell to printers. This is the story of a hero figure, the faults and attributes duly noted, a biographical study that will interest the layman as well as the professional.

The student of typography will hope for something more: a thorough analysis of Goudy's numerous type designs. Mr. Bruckner does provide a long review of the Deepdene type and briefer accounts of nine others. But he is reluctant to offer firm critical opinions about them. "The typefaces in this section are not necessarily those I think are among Goudy's best," he writes. "In fact, that is an argument I would like to avoid." For the rest of the corpus, Mr. Bruckner simply supplies short summaries of what Goudy himself said about the types in his autobiographical *Half-Century of Type Design*, published in the year before his death and reprinted in 1978. Goudy was not a single star; other American designers in his time created typefaces of significance. His attitude, though, and the style of his work were so different from theirs that an evaluation of his work in comparative terms would have helped the reader to decide just how high Goudy's pedestal should be.

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Mr. Bruckner has not been well served by the designer of the book. His text is presented in narrow newspaperlike columns, so that it is upstaged by the illustrations, which are generously treated.

Among a number of errors are these: May Morris was William Morris's daughter, not his wife; Charles Ricketts was not "Sir," nor was Bernard Newdigate; I belonged to Linotype, not Monotype; and in my study of Goudy's types I commented on thirty of them, not seventeen. It is grievous to see the admirable St. Bride Printing Library given a misleading name.

—*Walter Tracy*

John Gross, editor The Oxford Book of Essays. Oxford University Press, 680 pages, $30

"A loose sally of the mind"—that was Dr. Johnson's crisp sally about Montaigne's great literary invention. John Gross, editor of this generous collection of essays in English, mentions the genre's variety, its "intimacy and informality," its "civilizing force." His efforts remind us that wit, poignancy, literary flair, and sparkling erudition may also belong to the craft and unsullen art of the essay.

Former editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* and author of *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, Mr. Gross has selected well over a hundred essays by nearly as many hands for this companionable volume. The breadth and curiosity of his selection suggest that, in the person of Mr. Gross, anyway, the man of letters has not altogether fallen. Most readers will find some familiar favorites in this expansive garland; virtually all will encounter at least a few new names and fresh pieces by familiar names.

Francis Bacon, Thomas Browne, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, William Hazlitt, Henry and William James, Max Beerbohm, G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Epstein, and Gore Vidal are here, as are John Earle, Thomas Fuller, W. H. Hudson, and other lesser-known practitioners. There are admonitions and advisories ("How the Distempers of these Times should affect wise Men," Owen Felltham, *c.* 1620), literary pieces like Thomas De Quincey's classic "The Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth,'" and bagatelles like Leigh Hunt's amusing complaint, "Getting Up on Cold Mornings."

Mr. Gross has provided something for every mood and fancy. There are eloquently indignant pieces like Dr. Johnson's fulminations against debtors' prisons; lucid biographical summaries like Lord Macaulay's assessment of Lord Clive's career; and astute, commonsensical recommendations like Walter Bagehot's "Dull Government." ("Dullness in matters of government," Bagehot observes, "is a good sign.") There is William James's famous blast against academic fatuity, "The Ph.D. Octopus," and the historian Lewis Namier's brilliant "Symmetry and Repetition": "The effort which people put up to avoid thinking," Namier begins, "might almost enable them to think and to have some new ideas." Nor should one neglect Clive James's devastating review of Judith Krantz's *Princess Daisy*, one of the funniest critical salvos I have read. And if, by chance, you have ever wondered gratefully why insects do not grow to the size of lobsters, J. B. S. Haldane's charming piece "On Being the Right Size" will tell you.

In "Aes Triplex," Robert Louis Stevenson offers sound advice to those burdened by thoughts of mortality. Dismissing divines who reduce "life to the dimensons of a mere funeral procession" as well as "melancholy unbelievers yearning for the tomb," Stevenson sensibly proposes "a good meal and a bottle of wine" as an effective "answer to most standard works upon the question." "Although few things are spoken of with more fearful whisperings than this prospect of death," he observes, "few have less influence on conduct under healthy circumstances."

Perhaps my favorite discovery was Ambrose Bierce's "Disintroductions," which expresses the (utopian?) desire that "some great social force, say a billionaire, would set up a system of disintroductions" to dissolve inadvertent or irritating acquaintanceships. It would work like this:

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MR. WHITE—Mr. Black, knowing the low esteem in which you hold each other, I have the honor to disintroduce you from Mr. Green.

MR. BLACK (*bowing*)—Sir, I have long desired the advantage of your unacquaintance.

MR. GREEN (*bowing*)—Charmed to unmeet you, sir. Our acquaintance . . . has distressed me beyond expression. We are greatly indebted to our good friend here for his tact in repairing the mischance.

MR. WHITE—Thank you. I'm sure you will become very good strangers.

I hope that in the next edition of this delightful book Mr. Gross will have space to provide some brief biographical and bibliographical information. I also hope that Oxford will engage a competent proofreader to correct the many typos that got by. Mark Twain once wrote that reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated. Yet not, I feel sure, as exaggerated as dating his bitter essay "Thoughts of God" "*early 1990s*" suggests.

—Roger Kimball

Michael Kreyling Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 216 pages, $22.95

In May 1940, when she received her first letter from Diarmuid Russell, Eudora Welty was thirty-one years old and the author of a dozen short stories that had appeared, usually without payment, in little magazines and campus quarterlies. Russell, then thirty-seven, was a former editor at Putnam's, fired for protesting a contract that exploited a young author's ignorance. His letter to Welty was one of the first he had written as a partner in Russell & Volkening, the literary agency he had founded that spring at the urging of Maxwell Perkins. "Dear Miss Welty," he began, "I write to you to see if you might need the services of an agent. I suppose you know the parasitic way an agent works taking 10% of the author's takings. He is rather a benevolent parasite because authors as a rule make more when they have an agent than they do without one."

"Yes," replied Welty, "be my agent. Just as [your] letter was given to me, I finished a story, and holding one in each hand, it seemed inevitable." What did not seem inevitable, and what indeed remains extraordinary, is the long association that was to follow. It was a shrewdly-run business venture, it was a candid critical dialogue, but it was also something more: a loyal, long-distance friendship that spanned thirty-three years —some thick, many thin—ending only with Russell's death in 1973. That this alliance between artist and agent was the great treasure of both their working lives is evident from their correspondence, which Michael Kreyling, a professor of English at Vanderbilt University, has fashioned into an appealing book. The letters tell, always with a touch of humor, the story of both the difficult rise of a dedicated, unprolific, tough-to-market writer and the degeneration of the publishing profession into the contemporary "book biz." "If Welty has survived against the odds of literary America," writes Kreyling, "Russell deserves much of the credit." It was he who first placed her in national magazines, who saw the novel in the story that became *Delta Wedding*, who squeezed every cent out of anthologists, adapters, and paperback reprinters in the fallow years between *The Bride of the Innisfallen* (1955) and *Losing Battles* (1970). "His terms were not uncertain," remembers Welty; "you knew how well he liked something and how well he didn't. I just can't tell you what it meant to me to have him there. His integrity, his understanding, his instincts—everything was something I trusted."

In this age of publishing by conglomerate, in which the role of the editor is an ever diminishing thing, the writer's closest ally has become his agent. Diarmuid Russell in his letters shows the best that an agent can be. One hopes that the model he provides in this book will draw to his profession a few young people whose taste for literature is matched by real business savvy. The survival of the serious writer in America—of today's young Eudora Weltys—may well depend on them.

—Christopher Carduff

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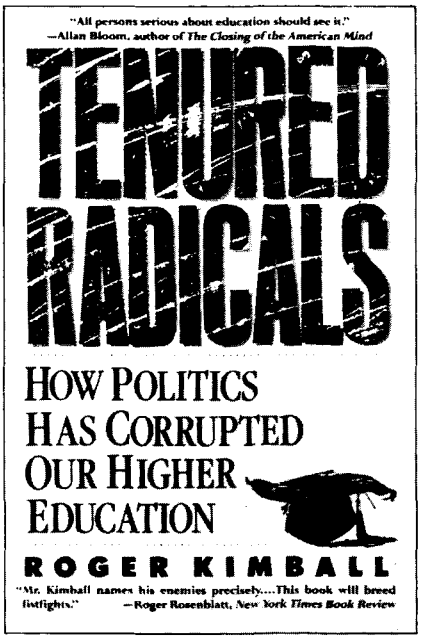
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